Frank Merriwell's Foes

BY

BURT L. STANDISH

AUTHOR OF

"Frank Merriwell's School Days," "Frank Merriwell's Chums," etc.

195

PHILADELPHIA

DAVID McKAY, PUBLISHER

604-8 SOUTH WASHINGTON SQUARE

Copyright, 1902
By STREET & SMITH

Frank Merriwell's Foes

PS
3531
P2685 f

CONTENTS.

I—The Start 5
II—The Professor's Dilemma 11
III—On the Train 16
IV—Further Excitement 22
V—Frank Introduces the Professor . . . 27
VI—Still More Trouble 32
VII—A Startling Assertion 38
VIII—Story of the Spectre 43
IX—The Strange Ring 50
X—Pursuing a Prowler 56
XI—A Revelation 59
XII—The Last of the Spectre 65
XIII—Friends and Foes 70
XIV—Frank is Wary 76
XV—Training for the Contests 81
XVI—On the Field 86
XVII—Accident or Design? 92
XVIII—Throwing the Hammer 98
XIX—Jumping 105
XX—Ready for the Dash 112
XXI—Defeated by a Trick 118
XXII—The Hurdle Race 124
XXIII—The Last Match 130
XXIV—An Eventful Night 137

XXV—Sailor Jack 142
XXVI—Hodge in Trouble 147
XXVII—The Hermit 152
XXVIII—A Spy 160
XXIX—The Shore of the Lake 165
XXX—Capture of the Boat 168
XXXI—On the Island 174
XXXII—The Burning of the Hut . . . 180
XXXIII—Frank's Fate 188
XXXIV—Last Words With the Hermit . . 192
XXXV—The Hands of Friends 198
XXXVI—Go Ahead ! 203
XXXVII—Boy Life-savers 210
XXXVIII—'Gainst Wind and Wave . . . 217
XXXIX—The Doomed Schooner 223
XL—The Coast Guard 228
XLI—The Work of Rescue 233
XLII—Cast Into the Sea 239
XLIII—Out of the Sea 244
XLIV—Carlos Merriwell 249
XLV—Jealousy 255
XLVI—Fire! 261
XLVII—From the Flames 266

FRANK MERRIWELL'S FOES.

CHAPTER I.

THE START.

One day the mail for Fardale Military Academy brought Frank Merriwell a letter from his uncle. Tearing open the envelope, he was soon reading the following brief and rather surprising message:

My Dear Nephew—Come home without delay. Strange things are happening here. I am not very well, and the end cannot be far away. I wish to make arrangements concerning your future. I have written Professor Gunn, asking that you be given a furlough, and requesting him, if possible, to allow one of the professors to accompany you. Come as soon as possible, for, since the visitation of last night, I fear what the return of another night may bring forth. My nerves are severely shaken. I am not superstitious, but I have begun to believe that there are actually "more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our philosophy." Your affectionate uncle,

Asher D. Merriwell.

Having read this, Frank gave a long whistle, expressive of the state of his feelings.

"What in the world can be the matter with Uncle Asher?" he muttered, perplexed. "He was the picture of health when I saw him last, and he has not mentioned being ill in any of his other letters. Then he says strange things are happening there, and speaks of a 'visitation.' If there was a streak of insanity anywhere in our family, I might think Uncle Asher off in his mind, but I know

better than to fancy anything of that sort, so I do not know what to imagine."

He read the brief letter over and over, but the more he studied it the greater became his bewilderment, and so he finally abandoned the task as hopeless, knowing all would be explained when he arrived home.

As Frank anticipated, Professor Gunn sent for him, and he went to the head instructor's tent, the letter from Frank's uncle having been received during the first week of the summer encampment at Fardale Academy.

"Mr. Merriwell," said the old professor, carefully adjusting his glasses on the end of his nose, and peering over them with an owl-like expression, "I have received a very surprising request from your uncle—very surprising. He asks that you be sent home on furlough, and that one of my assistants accompany you. Both Professor Scotch and Professor Jenks are anxious to embrace the opportunity to get away from their duties for a short time, and, as your esteemed uncle has offered to pay liberally for the privilege of having you come home in charge of a careful and painstaking tutor, I have decided to comply with his wishes—yes, sir, I have decided to do so."

Frank remained silent, waiting respectfully for the professor to proceed.

Professor Gunn cleared his throat, pressed his thumbs and the tips of his fingers together, and, still staring owl-like over the glasses, which were recklessly perched on the end of his long, thin nose, continued:

"I presume you will understand that this concession on my part is quite unusual. Never in the history of Fardale Military Academy has such a request been made before, and I have concluded to ask you a few questions—a very few questions."

Frank bowed.

"I am listening, professor," he said.

The head instructor seemed uneasy. He cleared his throat again, and, still keeping the tips of the fingers of both hands touching, began patting his thumbs together.

"Er—er—I do not wish to seem too inquisitive," he hesitatingly declared; "but I would like to inquire if this uncle, with whom you have been living since your parents' death, is in any way—er—er—eccentric?"

"Well, I don't know," replied Frank. "He is rather bluff, and he may be slightly different from the common run of people."

"Er—er—exactly. But is he—is he—mentally sound? Is his mind all right—quite well balanced?"

"It has always seemed so. He has had mind enough to make a very large fortune, for neither Uncle Asher nor his brother, my father, had a dollar with which to start out in life, and uncle is a very rich man now. He started in with the determination to buy back the family homestead, which my grandfather lost by speculation, and he now owns the old place, and a great deal of adjoining property; and his income is such that, for all of his expenditures, which are not light, his wealth is steadily increasing."

Professor Gunn coughed, nodded, and said:

"Very well, very well! Such a man has a right to be eccentric—a perfect right. But his letter to me was peculiar—I did not understand it. He may be ill—something may be troubling his mind."

"It is possible, sir."

"Well, I will permit you to make your choice between Professor Scotch and Professor Jenks. Both desire the outing, and I have decided to spare one of them for a short time. Which do you prefer as a companion during your furlough?"

Frank hesitated. It was difficult for him to tell which

of the two professors he preferred, but he finally decided to take Professor Scotch, whose fiery hair and peppery temper had led the cadets sportively to nickname him "Hot Scotch."

"Great Scott!" thought Frank; "won't there be a circus if Uncle Asher and Professor Scotch take a dislike to each other! Uncle has a temper that needs filing, and Scotch is always prancing round with a chip on his shoulder."

Professor Gunn directed Frank to be ready to take the train early in the morning, stating that Professor Scotch should be on hand to accompany him.

Frank did not lose the opportunity to seek permission to spend the evening in Fardale village, for he did not wish to leave without seeing Inza Burrage and letting her know that he was going away for a short time. Inza was the girl that Frank admired above all others in the pretty village near which Fardale Military Academy was located.

Being by far the most popular cadet in the school, it was not strange that, having told one or two friends that he was going away on furlough, the entire encampment soon knew of it, and Frank found himself constantly surrounded by a crowd of uniformed youths, who protested their regrets at the thought of losing him, even for a short time.

Bartley Hodge, Frank's tentmate, was utterly cast down and dejected.

"How long are you to be on furlough, Frank?" he asked.

"I don't know," was the reply. "I believe no definite length of time has been mentioned."

"But, great Jupiter! what can we do if you are not on hand to take part in our regular match ball games? Who will be our star pitcher?"

"I may get back in time. If I do not, you will have to find somebody to fill my place."

"That's impossible; nobody can fill your place, old man. Some fellow might make a bluff at it; but that's all it would amount to."

"Yaw," nodded Hans Dunnerwurst, the only Dutch boy in the school. "Dot peen a fact; und I vos goin' to do my lefel pest to pring him pack bretty queek alretty in dime to do der peeching dose games for."

"Going to do your best to bring him back?"

"Dot vos vot I said, ain'd id?"

"Well, what do you mean by that? How are you going to bring him back?"

"Don'd I lif der next town in dis side peyond vere Vrankie lifs? Vell, I shoult smile! Und don'd you said a vord apout dot; but I hat a ledder mein mutter from dot toldt me I hat pesser come righd avay home alretty yet. I took dot ledder der brofessor to, und he peen gif me a furlough der nexd two veeks for. Shimminy Gristmas! I peen gone righd along mit Vrankie on der drain in der morning, I pet you your life!"

"Well, Hans, this is good news!" cried Frank, grasping the Dutch lad's hand. "I shall be pleased to have you for a traveling companion."

"Dot vos natural. I peen so arisdogratic my looks in dot beople vill pelieve you vas draveling aroundt mit a duke."

"Professor Scotch is going along with us for a little vacation."

"You don'd pelieve me! Vell, we don'd done a thing der brofessor to! Yaw! yaw! yaw!"

After supper Frank found his opportunity to slip away from the camp without attracting the attention of the cadets, and he embraced it.

His call upon Inza was protracted as long as possible, and he barely got into camp in time to answer at tattoo.

Not knowing how long he would remain away from the academy, Frank packed his trunk in the morning so that he would have all the things he could need in several weeks.

Hans got everything he desired to carry into a huge extension grip, and Professor Scotch took a small trunk.

In due time, an expressman from the village called for the trunks and the passengers.

The cadets had gathered to see the trio off, and they gave the school cry as the express wagon rolled away, with Professor Scotch on the seat beside the driver, Hans sitting on Frank's trunk, and Frank standing up to make a farewell salute and wave his cap.

All together in one mighty chorus the battalion roared:

"Ha! ha! ha! Rah! rah! rah! Jigger-boom! Zigger-boom! Grape-shot! Canister! All hail Fardale! Ss-ss-ss-ss!"

The final mighty hiss was like the sound that comes from a rocket as it soars heavenward, which it was probably intended to represent.

Frank waved his cap.

"Good-by, fellows!" he shouted. "I will be with you again later on."

Once more the academy cry went up, and on the end of it Bart Hodge was heard to shout:

"Merriwell! Merriwell! Rah! rah! rah!"

The boys took up the cry as if it came from one pair of lips. It was a show of regard and esteem that brought a mist to Frank's eyes.

CHAPTER II.

THE PROFESSOR'S DILEMMA.

As the express wagon approached the village, Professor Scotch became rather nervous. At his request, the driver drove to the station by way of a back street. This did not escape the notice of the boys, who wondered what it meant.

Tickets were purchased and baggage checked, after which they were forced to wait ten minutes for the train.

During this time the little professor acted as if he were ready to run and hide at the slightest provocation.

"Vat vos der madder mit him, ain'd id?" asked Hans of Frank. "Anypody mighd pelief he vos sdole somedings."

"That's right," nodded Merriwell. "He certainly acts as if he is running away from something or somebody."

The little professor carried a large umbrella, and, with this held as if constantly ready for use, he sneaked up and down the platform, peering cautiously round corners.

The train whistled for Fardale, and at that moment, the professor was seen to open the umbrella quickly, and hold it between himself and a tall, angular woman who was hurrying toward the station.

"Great Scott!" gasped Frank, as the truth dawned on him. "There comes Nancy Cobb, the widow who has been receiving the attentions of both Professor Scotch and Professor Jenks. She acts as if she were on Scotch's trail."

"Dot's vot's der madder mit Hannah!" chuckled Hans. "Look ad der brofessor! He vos britty near scared fits

into alretty yet. Shimminy Gristmas! Dere vos peen a bicnic britty queek!"

The professor was, indeed, ghastly pale, and his knees seemed to quiver. He gazed wildly, longingly, at the approaching train, and then peered in a terrified way over the edge of the umbrella at the widow, who was hurrying straight toward the spot.

It was evident that the widow would arrive first.

The professor frantically beckoned for the boys to approach, and they hastened to his side.

"Say, can't you keep her off?" asked Scotch, desperately. "Can't you keep her away till I can board the train?"

"Keep who away?" asked Frank, innocently.

"Yaw; who she vos?" questioned Hans, with his mouth open in a wondering manner. "Vos she tangerous?"

"Dangerous? She's worse than dynamite! Jenks must have told her I was going—confound him! Keep her away!"

"But I thought you were paying her attentions? I thought you contemplated something serious in that direction?"

"I did," confessed Scotch, excitedly; "but I've changed my mind. It's leap-year, you know, and she proposed to me the last time I saw her. I about half accepted her; but I have regretted it since. She means business! She's going to try to stop me, and compel me to marry her! Boys, I am a desperate man! I had rather die than meet such a fate! Can't you save me? Can't you—— Mercy! here she is!"

The umbrella had not served to hide him sufficiently to deceive the widow, who now confronted him.

"What's the meanin' of this, I want to know?" she cried, in a shrill, high-pitched tone. "Where be you goin', Horace Orman Tyler Scotch?"

"Er—er—I'm going into the country," stammered the little man, backing away, and keeping an eye on the train, which was drawing up at the station.

"The country? What country?" sharply demanded the widow, who was very hard of hearing, although she never acknowledged it.

"Oh, to some place I may select by chance," evasively replied the professor.

"Direct to France!" squealed the widow, wildly. "Well, I ruther think I'll have something to say about that! You'll find I've got a claim on you, and when you go to France, you'll take me along as your bride. You have given me your promise, an' you can't break it! I'm not a female woman that you can trifle with, sir! I am no sixteen-year-old gal, with paper curls all over her forrud! I know a thing or two, an' I'm goin' to hold you to your word, ur sue you for breeches of promise! What have you got to say to that, sir?"

"Don't make a scene in public!"

"Ain't been published. Well, we can be mighty quick. If you ain't got gumption enough to attend to that, I will, and I'll get the license."

"Oh, go 'way!"

"Day? Why, any day. I'd as lief be married one day as another."

"You don't understand."

"Want my hand. Well, you can have it; an' now I've got evidence that you've asked for it, an' that you wanted the weddin'-day sot. You can't squirm out of it now, Horace Orman Tyler Scotch."

"Oh, dear!" groaned the little professor, wiping beads of cold perspiration from his face and looking appealingly at the boys, who were doing their best to keep from shrieking with laughter. "How can I get out of this trap?"

"I don't see that there is any way out of it, professor," replied Frank. "You will have to marry the lady."

"Yaw," chuckled Hans. "You vos caught her so tight you can't neffer git avay."

The people on the station platform had gathered around, and were grinning at what they saw and heard, while others were looking from the car windows and smiling.

The professor felt as if he longed to sink into the earth, and thus get out of sight.

"Look here!" he suddenly shouted, standing on his toes, so that he might bring his lips as near the widow's ear as posssible, "you have made a mistake."

"Made what kind of a break? That's slang, professor. I am shocked to hear you use it."

"Made a mistake! Made a mistake! Made a mistake!" shrieked the little man, getting red in the face. "I never said I'd marry you! Oh, I feel like taking human life!" he exclaimed, in a lower tone.

"Feel like making me your wife! Well, how be you goin' to do that if you don't marry me?"

It was impossible for the boys to repress their merriment longer, and the spectators joined with them in a hearty burst of laughter.

By this time Professor Scotch's face was the color of a piece of red flannel. He closed the umbrella, and flourished it wildly in the air, as he howled:

"What do you think I want of an old woman like you, who can't hear a cannon when it's fired! If you don't go away and let me alone, I'll have you arrested and locked up as a lunatic! I mean business now, and don't you forget it!"

"Don't you strike me with that umbrella—don't you dast do such a thing!" squawked the widow, as she made a grab and caught hold of it. "I could have you put in

jail for threatenin' me, an' I'll do it, if you don't come to time an' make me your wife."

She tugged at one end of the umbrella, and the professor pulled at the other.

"Let go!" he thundered in his big, hoarse voice.

"Leggo yourself!" snapped the widow, trying to twist it out of his hands. "I ain't goin' to give you another chance to hit me with this deadly instrument."

"All aboard!"

The conductor gave the cry, and Frank and Hans hastened to get upon the nearest car. From the steps Frank called:

"Come, come, professor! The train is going. You'll be left, if you don't look out."

Professor Scotch cast one wild, despairing look at the train.

"All aboard!" called the conductor, for the last time.

The signal was given for the train to start.

The professor resolved to abandon the umbrella, and so he let go suddenly, and started for the car, which began to move.

"No, ye don't!" squealed the widow.

Reaching out quickly, she caught the hook at the end of the umbrella handle into the little man's collar, and held him fast.

"Coot-by, brofessor!" laughed Hans.

"Send us cards," called Frank.

But the professor was not going to be left. With a sudden movement, he slipped out of his coat, and the widow, who had been pulling so hard to hold him, fell over backward and rolled off the station platform.

With a wild leap for liberty, the professor caught the rail and swung safely onto the steps of the moving train.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE TRAIN.

"Merciful goodness!" gasped the little professor, as he came near collapsing in a fainting condition. "What a narrow escape from a horrible fate!"

"You do not seem to be as much in love with the widow as you were once on a time," observed Frank.

"In love with her—in love with that woman!" roared the professor, in his big voice. "I was never in love with her! I pretended to be, in order to make Jenks jealous, and I came near putting my foot in it. Now that I am away, she will lay for him, and I hope by all that is merciful that she will get him. I'll never return to Fardale till she does."

Leaning out from the steps and looking back, Frank saw the widow scramble to her feet and stand on the platform, waving the umbrella, and screaming after the train.

"Quick, professor!" cried Merriwell, with a chuckle; "take a look at your lady love. She is cutting a figure now."

"She isn't pursuing the train, is she?"asked Scotch, excitedly. "She'll overtake it, if she starts out!"

He looked back, and the widow saw him, which made her wave the umbrella still more frantically, and shake her fist threateningly.

The professor drew back, with a shudder.

"Let's go into the car," he said. "I feel weak and faint, and I must sit down."

Hans and the professor found a seat together, while Frank sat directly behind them.

The people in the car greeted the little man with grins and smiles, making him feel as if he would like to dash in and attack the whole crowd.

"Some people remind me of monkeys!" he rumbled, in his deep voice. "They grin at everything they see."

He glared at a fat woman in the opposite seat, and the fat woman tried to look haughty. She was carrying a large covered basket in her lap.

Frank saw his opportunity for a little sport. Being a skillful ventriloquist, he made the fat woman seem to say:

"People are always seeing such things when they do not have a gun!"

"What's that, madam—what's that you say?" thundered the professor.

"I didn't say a word," declared the fat woman, drawing herself up as stiffly as she could. "You are very presuming in addressing me, sir."

"Oh, is that so!" flung back the irate professor. "It is possible, madam, that you do not know who I am."

"Well, you look like a lunatic. I should advise you to hide that silk hat till you can get a coat to wear. You look rather ridiculous sitting in your shirtsleeves with a silk hat on your head."

"This is a free country, madam—a free country!"

"Which is a fortunate thing for you."

"What do you mean—what do you mean by that?"

"I decline to have anything further to say to you, sir."

The fat woman braced back in her seat, with a very scornful expression on her expansive countenance.

Just ahead of the fat woman a long, lank, thin-necked farmer was sittin. He had twisted his neck around, and was watching with his eyes and mouth wide open, and his ears canted forward, like those of a mule that thinks he

hears something in advance. He had a face that would have made a funeral procession look jolly in comparison.

This old fellow had a chew of tobaccco in his mouth, and the moment he began to wag his jaws, Frank made him seem to say:

"That's where yeoure right, madam, by gosh! Yeou don't want to have nothin' to do with that air little runt. He's a base deceiver of the ladies, an' he's runnin' away from a gal tew which he's bin makin' love an' promised tew marry."

The little professor went into the air like a jack-in-the-box, landing in the aisle.

"You're a prevaricator!" he roared, shaking his fist under the farmer's long nose.

The farmer was astonished.

"D'ye mean me?" he asked, blankly.

"Yes, I mean you!" howled Scotch. "And I can back it up! I will——"

"Wal, darn my skin!" drawled the farmer. "I hain't opened my trap tew yeou, but there kan't no children git right up before the publick an' jawin' me without gittin' spanked!"

Then, quick as thought, he caught the professor by the arm, yanked the little man down across his knees, and began to spank him solidly, as he would have spanked a saucy child.

The entire carful of people laughed, and Hans Dunnerwust came near having a fit.

"Shimminy Gristmas!" laughed the Dutch lad, holding onto his sides. "Don't dot peat der band alretty yet! Uf dis keeps ub, there don'd peen nottings left uf der brofessor py der dime we ged to der end tud der shourney."

Scotch roared and kicked, but the lank farmer was strong, and he held the little man helpless till he was tired

of spanking him. Then he rose up, stepped into the aisle, and chucked the professor down into the seat at Hans' side, observing:

"There! jest you set right there, an' take keer who ye call names next time. If yeou try tew git up, darn my skin if I don't take off one of my shoes an' wear ther sole plumb out on the most spankable part of your person!"

The farmer had a long neck and a long body, but his legs were wonders. They seemed like pipestems, and they were so long that he looked as if he were standing on stilts. His head was away up in the top of the car.

Professor Scotch gazed up at the man, and then collapsed.

"It's no use for me to try to defend myself in this case," he muttered, sadly. "There isn't anything around here that I can stand on so that I can hit him above the belt."

"That's where you show your sense," said the farmer, as he resumed his seat. "You'd better find aout the kind of people you call names afore you call 'em that, b'gosh!"

The professor was sadly discomfited.

"This is the first time in all my life that anything of the kind ever happened to me," he said, sadly. "Half stripped of my clothes by a deaf widow, sauced by a fat woman, and spanked by a countryman with hayseed in his hair! Life has no terrors for me now, and I do not fear death!"

"Then it would be a fine thing for you to commit suicide," Frank made the fat woman seem to say.

The professor gave her a reproachful look, and then turned away, mournfully shaking his head. He did not care to get into any further trouble.

Merriwell was possessed with the spirit of mischief. He leaned over and asked the professor:

"What do you suppose she has in that basket?"

"I don't know," was the reply. "And I don't care."

"I will bet I can tell. She has two live pigs in there, or I am greatly mistaken."

"Get out!" exclaimed Scotch. "Are you trying to have some more fun at my expense?"

"Not at all, professor. You know that even very young pigs give themselves away by certain peculiarities. Now she is plainly a lady who wishes to be considered as perfectly proper in her way, and she would be rather embarrassed if it were known that she is carrying pigs about in a passenger car, even though such places are sometimes frequented by hogs who take entire seats to themselves."

"If she is carrying pigs in that basket, I'd like to know it," said the professor. "I'd complain to the conductor, and have that basket removed to the baggage car."

"Well, listen—you may hear them."

And it was not long before everybody in that vicinity seemed to hear the grunting of one or more small pigs, and the sounds appeared to come from the fat woman's basket. The fat woman herself looked around in surprise, not being able to locate the sounds.

Professor Scotch was electrified.

"I'll get even with her!" he delightedly whispered to the boys. "Wait till the conductor comes around to take up the tickets."

Long before the conductor appeared, Frank had caused the mythical pigs to attract the attention of everybody in the vicinity of the basket.

When the conductor demanded Professor Scotch's ticket, that worthy assumed a very indignant air, and asked:

"Is a man compelled to pay first-class fare and travel in the same car with swine, sir?"

"Ticket, please," said the conductor, loftily, without deigning to notice the question.

"Well, sir," returned Scotch, haughtily, "you'll receive no ticket from me till certain swine are removed from this car. I know my rights, sir, and I will stand on them. I am not speaking of human swine, either; I mean pigs, sir, pigs!"

"You must be loony!" said the conductor.

"Well, sir, I am not. This woman here with the basket, is carrying pigs about in a car that is set apart for human beings. It is an outrage, and I demand that the basket and its contents be removed."

The conductor looked at the fat woman, and then at the basket.

"It is a base fabrication!" exclaimed the highly-indignant woman, her face getting crimson. "That man must be a lunatic! Pigs, indeed!"

Then she lifted the cover of the basket, and showed that it was quite empty.

CHAPTER IV.

FURTHER EXCITEMENT.

Professor Scotch had half risen, so that he might get a good look into the basket. When he saw that it was empty, he gave a groan of mingled astonishment and dismay, and dropped back limply in his seat.

"I have just been on a visit to my daughter," explained the indignant fat woman, "and I took her a few things in this basket which I am carrying home. That insolent, insignificant, half-clothed creature began by insulting me the moment he entered the car, and this is his crowning effort. I think he is crazy."

"But—but," weakly stammered the professor, "we all heard the pigs grunting, and the sound seemed to come from that basket, so I——"

"Hand over your ticket," demanded the conductor, crushingly. "You certainly appear to be dangerous, and it is my opinion that you ought to be confined where you can do no harm. If you annoy this lady further, I shall feel it my duty to have you ejected from the train at the first station."

Never was a man more completely broken up than was Professor Scotch at that moment. He felt through his pockets for his ticket, but could not find it, which added to his agitation and dismay.

"I—I believe I have lost my ticket, sir," he stammered. "I certainly had it, but——"

"This railroad does not propose to carry beats, and, as we are running ahead of time, I think we'll drop you right here," said the conductor, as he reached for the bell-cord.

"Hold on! hold on!" fluttered the professor. "The ticket was in my coat; I have lost my coat, but I have my purse. I can pay my way, and I'd have you know I am no beat. Appearances may be against me, but——"

"Ninety-five cents," came sharply from the conductor's lips, as he saw the professor produce his money. "That will take you to the next station, where you must obtain a ticket to your destination. You can get a rebate of ten cents on this ticket at any station on this line."

He rapidly punched out a slip as he spoke, and this he gave to the professor, who paid for it.

Frank and Hans had their tickets ready, and the conductor soon passed on, but, before doing so, he assured the fat woman that she should be protected from further annoyance.

"Young gentlemen," said the professor, turning to his companions for sympathy, "this is certainly the most humiliating day of my life. Never before have I passed through such an experience, and I never want to again."

"Vell, I don'd plame you for dot, brofessor," grinned Hans. "It don'd peen some fun for you, ain'd id?"

"Not much! I am nearly prostrated."

"Brace up, professor," said Frank, encouragingly. "You're all right. Those pigs are somewhere, and I believe they were in that basket."

"Then what became of them?"

"The woman must have hidden them under her clothes. I am keeping watch of her to see that she does not put them back into the basket. If you can find those pigs, you will be exonerated."

"And I demand exoneration!" rumbled Scotch, fiercely. "What was that?"

This exclamation was produced by a smothered grunting that came from some mysterious locality.

"It sounded like those pigs," said Frank.

The professor was now greatly excited, and he listened attentively, determined to locate the mysterious pigs.

Of a sudden, a strange squealing, smothered, but distinct, was heard by every one in the car. The conductor, who was about to pass through into the next car, stopped and looked round in amazement.

Professor Scotch leaped into the aisle, exclaiming:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I call on you to witness that I spoke the truth when I claimed there were swine in this car! They are here somewhere, for you can all hear them now."

The squealing continued. It semed to come from beneath the seat where the fat woman was sitting.

Down went the professor on his knees, and began to claw around under the seat.

The fat woman gave a shriek, and climbed as quickly as possible upon the seat, from which position she reached down and belted the professor over the head with the basket.

"You horrid man!" she cried.

The squealing continued, growing more distinct.

"I'll find those pigs or perish in the attempt!" roared Scotch, as he clawed about wildly beneath the seat.

The squealing now seemed to come from beneath the next seat, and the countryman began to grow excited.

"That is a pig, b'gosh!" he shouted, as he doubled up and tried to look under the seats. "Critter saounds 'zif it was hungry. Hey, you little rooster! where be ye? Come aout of this!"

But the squealing swiftly moved to the next seat, where two demure maidens were sitting, and they lost no time in attempting to climb to a safe place on the back of the seat.

Down the car went the sound, and, in less than ten seconds, the entire place was in an uproar.

The two demure maidens were clinging to each other and trying to balance themselves on the back of the seat, while they cried:

"Help! help! Save us!"

"All right," came gallantly from Frank Merriwell's lips, as he hastened across the aisle, incidentally stepping on the small of Professor Scotch's back, as that worthy was still trying to discover the pigs under the car seats.

"Wow!" roared the professor. "My spine is fractured! I'll sue this railroad for damages!"

"Help!" shrieked the demure maidens, again.

"Depend on me," said Frank, as he reached them, and kept them from falling into the aisle.

One of the girls threw her arms about his neck, and clung to him with all her strength.

"Shimminy Gristmas!" gurgled Hans. "Uf I don'd peen in dot righd avay, I vos slow!"

He hurried across the aisle as swiftly as he could, and addressed the girl who was not clinging to Frank.

"Oxcuse me; mein neck vos ad your service, young laty. Uf you ged holt uf id dight, I don'd let more as sefendeen regiments uf peegs do nottings to you."

"Oh, I am dreadfully frightened!" gasped the girl. "I am afraid of such horrid things! It is real good of you to offer your protection."

Then she came near losing her balance, and was forced to clasp him around the neck in the same way that the other girl had clasped Frank.

"Yum, yum!" gurgled the Dutch boy. "Don'd I vos glat I come!"

At this moment one of the train hands opened the door, and there came a joyful squeal from that locality, as if the mysterious pigs were delighted to obtain some fresh air. The sound seemed to come from the train-hand's

feet, and he made a wild jump into the air, craning his neck to look downward.

Then the squealing seemed to come from the outside of the car, and, of a sudden, it ceased entirely.

"Them pigs has got oaut an' run off the car, b'gosh!" shouted the tall farmer.

"But everybody present knows they were in this car!" roared Professor Scotch, struggling to his feet and confronting the conductor. "You owe me an apology, sir!"

The other passengers were highly indignant, and they crowded about the conductor, using threatening language and gestures, so that he was glad to break away and plunge precipitately from the car.

It was some time before the excitement subsided.

When Professor Scotch began to cool down somewhat, he looked around for his two youthful companions. He found them without any trouble. They were seated and chatting reassuringly, with the demure maidens at their sides.

"How you vos, brofessor," nodded Hans, as the wild-eyed little man regarded them in astonishmnet.

"Bah!" roared the professor, and he went off to a corner seat, where he sat and enjoyed himself immensely for some time by hating all mankind.

CHAPTER V.

FRANK INTRODUCES THE PROFESSOR.

The professor grew fearful that Nancy Cobb would wire an order for his arrest at the next station; but nothing of the kind occurred, and he was able to purchase a ticket and continue the journey.

Not having time to stop anywhere long enough to purchase a coat at a clothing store, he succeeded in buying a light-weight overcoat of a passenger.

As the original owner of the coat was a large man, it did not fit Professor Scotch very well, but he made the best of it, and found that he attracted much less attention than when he was sitting in his shirtsleeves, with his silk hat decorously perched on his head.

Frank and Hans seemed to enjoy themselves very much chatting and laughing with their new acquaintances, and the professor was left by himself till the girls came to their stopping place, which was not far from midday.

The boys gallantly helped the girls from the train, and lingered with them till the train was about to start again. Then they boarded the train and waved their handkerchiefs to the girls as long as they were in sight.

They found Professor Scotch still humped up in a corner of the car, looking extremely disgusted and disconsolate.

"Well, professor," said Frank, lightly, "I hope you are enjoying the journey."

"Oh, I am!" growled the little man, like an enraged mastiff. "I am having such a delightful time that I feel

like committing suicide for fear I will be pleased to death! This has been one grand, hilarious picnic from the start! It has been nearly as funny as marrying the Widow Cobb!"

"Oh, I am glad you are finding it so pleasant," came innocently from Frank's lips. "Now, Hans and I have——"

"Been making fools of yourselves! I looked out of the window and saw it all. Everybody in the car laughed."

"Well, it is a pleasant thing to furnish amusement for some people. I think you will continue to enjoy yourself when you reach The Elms."

"The Elms? Where's that?"

"That is the old colonial place owned by my uncle. You will find Uncle Asher a very gentle, mild-mannered man. He has a few peculiar ideas that you will do well to humor."

"Indeed? It will be well enough to let me know what they are."

"Certainly. In the first place, he is a great admirer of the new woman. He believes in women's rights."

"Well, he must be a fool!" roared Scotch. "Women have too many rights now!"

"Well, you may hold such an opinion, and my uncle may think differently. I advise you to humor him, and you will do well to mention at an early date that you are an ardent believer in women's rights."

"I'll try to do so; but it may choke me. What other peculiar ideas does your uncle entertain?"

"He is a personal friend of Dr. Mary Walker, and he believes that women should be given the privilege to dress like men, if they so desire."

Professor Scotch growled his deep disgust.

"He is also something of a temperance crank," continued Frank. "It is one of his beliefs that a person who

touches liquor is utterly depraved. You will do well to ask him how the Good Templars are prospering in his vicinity."

"Doesn't he believe in the moderate use of alcohol for medicinal purposes?"

"He believes it is a creation of the Evil One, and he will not tolerate it for any purpose."

The professor groaned.

"He has other peculiarities which I will enumerate later," added Frank, airily.

At noon they stopped for refreshments at a station restaurant, and it was mid-afternoon when they arrived at Bloomfield, the end of the journey for Frank and the professor, who bade Hans farewell, as he was going on to the next town.

Frank had not telegraphed that he was coming, and so they found no one at the station to meet them.

"It is probable Uncle Asher is not looking for me before to-morrow," he said. "We'll walk over, and give him a surprise. It is not very far."

The village of Bloomfield seemed fast asleep. It was a quiet old place, with many ancient houses.

At a distance beyond the outskirts of the village, they came in view of a large, old-fashioned house and other buildings, which were surrounded by lofty elms. Everything about the place was in a state of perfect repair, and it was plainly the home of a country gentleman of means.

"That is The Elms," said Frank, with pride. "It has been the home of our family for generations. It passed from my grandfather's hands; but Uncle Asher bought it back, with the intention of passing the last days of his life here."

Professor Scotch was delighted with the beauties of the place, and expressed himself freely.

"Ah," he said, "we are sure to spend our time quietly

and peacefully while we remain here. Now I am glad I came."

"We will go round to the back door," said Frank. "I want to make the surprise as pleasant as possible for Uncle Asher. Follow me, and I will take you right into the house."

So Frank led the way, and they entered from the back door, which was unfastened.

Frank led the way toward the library, and they encountered no one. The old house, which was magnificently furnished in antique style, seemed deserted till Frank threw open the library door.

At that moment a voice roared:

"I didn't ask for this, you blundering black rascal! What do you mean by bringing me a bootjack when I am in my slippers?"

Frank saw something coming through the air, and dodged. The professor did not see it, and he did not dodge.

The bootjack, for such it was, struck the professor over the left eye and knocked him flat in a moment.

The unfortunate man gave a roar of astonishment and pain.

Then a voice was heard crying:

"Golly sakes alibe, massa, dere's buglers in dis house fo' suah! Dat bootjack hit done knock one ob 'em ober flat!"

Frank had fallen back from the door, not caring to encounter any missiles that might follow the bootjack.

"Burglars, eh?" shouted the voice of the first speaker. "Well, I've prepared for anything!"

Then a large, florid-faced man came rushing out of the library, and flung himself heavily on the little professor, who was just starting to get up.

"Lie still, you scoundrel!" roared the big man, as he

fished around in his hip-pocket, and finally succeeded in bringing forth a revolver. "Lie still, or I will have your life! I bought this revolver to-day, and it's warranted to be a first-class shooting-iron!"

"Mercy!" hoarsely gurgled the professor.

"I'll give you mercy in jail, where you belong. Toots!"

"Yessar."

The face of a coal-black darky appeared at the library door.

"Bring me some rope to bind this fellow with, you black rascal!"

"All right, sar."

"Hold on, Toots," said Frank. "You needn't bother about it. Uncle Asher, allow me the great pleasure of introducing you to Professor Scotch, of Fardale Academy, on whose stomach you are sitting at this moment."

CHAPTER VI.

STILL MORE TROUBLE.

"Golly sakes to goodness!" squealed Toots, in delight. "Why, it am Massa Frank!"

"Eh, eh?" grunted Mr. Merriwell, still retaining his seat astride Professor Scotch, and staring at the boy in astonishment. "Frank? Why, I didn't expect——"

"We came in by the back way, thinking to give you a slight surprise, uncle."

"But I rather think the surprise came the other way," groaned the professor, clasping a hand over the eye that had been struck by the bootjack.

"Well, blow me wide!" gurgled Asher Merriwell, in amazement.

Indeed he was so greatly amazed that he continued to sit heavily upon the professor; and, as he weighed not far from two hundred and fifty pounds, the man at the bottom was far from comfortable.

"Er—excuse me," gasped Scotch. "You seem to be crushing my liver-pad. If you will rise long enough for me to remove it, I shall then be quite pleased to have you sit on me till you get tired."

"I beg your pardon—I beg your pardon!" spluttered Uncle Asher. "Here, Toots, you ebony villain, give me a hand, and help me arise!"

"Permit me, uncle," said Frank, quickly, thrusting Toots aside.

Grasping his uncle's hand, the mischievous fellow cried:

"Now we come—all together, rise!"

He gave a surge, and pulled Mr. Merriwell half-way to his feet. Then their hold on each other's hands broke, and the corpulent gentleman fell back heavily upon the unhappy professor, driving the breath from the little man's lips.

"Oh, golly!" giggled Toots, doubling up with merriment, and clasping both hands over his mouth to keep from bursting into a shriek of laughter.

"Er—Frank, Frank, Frank!" spluttered Uncle Asher. "Be careful! The professor may be injured in this manner."

"Oh, no!" came faintly, but fiercely, from Scotch's lips. "Don't mind me! If you find any pleasure in it, jump on me with both feet. You won't harm me in the least! I am made of iron; I haven't any feeling at all."

"My dear sir," said Mr. Merriwell, sternly, "I presume you mean that such sarcasm shall be very cutting. I am not pleased to be addressed in such a manner—not at all."

"Well, I am delighted to be knocked down with a bootjack, jumped on by a man who weighs a ton and threatened with a loaded revolver! Such a reception fills my soul with delight!"

"An unfortunate mistake has occurred here, but it is of small consequence."

"Oh, yes, it is a very insignificant affair! I still live, so it is of no consequence. Would you mind shifting your position a trifle, so that I may feel myself over to learn how many of my ribs are broken?"

"Here, Frank, get hold again!"

"Hold on!" faintly roared the professor. "If it is going to be the same thing over again, I had much rather you remain seated!"

"We will endeavor to make it a success this time. Cling

fast, Frank! Toots, give me a push behind! Now—heave away!"

This time Uncle Asher was lifted to his feet, and a great groan of relief came from the professor's lips.

"This is a very unfortunate affair, professor," said Frank, as he lifted the little man to his feet; "but you are still alive, for which you should be thankful."

"I am. I have passed through the most deadly perils to-day."

"Sir," said Mr. Merriwell, "I welcome you to my home. I am very glad to meet my son's instructor. I will send to the kitchen immediately for a slice of steak to be bound over that eye, for I see that it threatens to turn black."

"You are very kind!" murmured Professor Scotch, as he staggered forward and collapsed into a chair.

Toots was dispatched for the slice of steak.

"My dear boy!" exclaimed Uncle Asher, embracing Frank, "I am delighted to see you once more! You are looking well and brown as a berry. Cadet life must agree with you."

"It does, uncle. But you seem to be looking well, also. I expected to find you an invalid. In your letter you asked me to hasten here, saying you were not very well."

"I did not feel well at the time."

"What was the matter?"

"That I will explain later. I have some strange things to tell you."

Toots soon returned with the slice of steak, and, with the aid of a handkerchief, this was bound over Professor Scotch's left eye.

"You know where your old room is, Frank," said Mr. Merriwell. "The professor will be given the guests' chamber. I will send to the station at once for your luggage. Give Toots the checks."

Frank handed the checks to the darky, who was of uncertain age, and had a face that continually wore a repressed grin.

When Toots had departed, Frank said:

"I think I will run up to my room. It seems so good to get back to the old place! Professor, I will leave you with Uncle Asher."

The little man looked alarmed, and beckoned for Frank to approach. When the boy came near the chair on which the professor was sitting, Scotch grasped his arm and pulled him down, to whisper in his ear:

"Is it safe? Isn't there danger that he will become violent again? My shattered system will not endure much more of this business."

"Why, uncle is one of the mildest men in the world," Frank whispered back.

"Hum!" coughed the professor, doubtingly. "He may be—he may be, but he has a queer way of showing it."

"That's all right. He is a trifle odd; but you will soon come to understand each other. Remember what I told you about his peculiar likes and dislikes, and you will soon be getting along famously with him."

Then Frank skipped away, and hurried upstairs.

Mr. Merriwell was standing with his hands under the tails of his dressing-gown, pretending to look out of a window. He turned round slowly, and found the professor steadily regarding him with his uninjured eye.

"Hem!" coughed Uncle Asher.

"Hum!" coughed the professor.

"This is a world of progress," said Uncle Asher, by way of saying something.

"It is, indeed," agreed the professor. "We have the railroad, the telegraph, the telephone, the new Rœntgen system of photography, and the new woman. Of all

these things, the new woman is by far the greatest and grandest."

"Humph!" grunted Uncle Asher.

"I have always been a sincere admirer of Dr. Mary Walker," continued the professor. "I believe women should be encouraged to adopt male attire."

"Woosh!" snorted Uncle Asher, beginning to pace up and down the room.

"When women are allowed to vote and permitted to wear male attire," continued the professor, thinking his companion's agitation came from satisfaction, "the golden age will again have dawned upon the world."

"Rot!" roared Mr. Merriwell, fiercely. "Confounded rot, sir! I took you to be a man of intelligence!"

"And I pride myself that I am," snapped the professor, stiffening up. "I believe you are a personal friend of Dr. Mary Walker, sir?"

"You're a lunatic! Do you think that I would have anything to do with a woman who wears men's clothes? Whoop! Stuck on the new woman, are you? Well, you're the biggest fool I have seen in a year!"

"What's that?" roared the professor, who had endured about all he could for one day. "Call me a fool? Well, you're another! You are a lunatic, sir—a raving maniac! I wouldn't remain beneath your roof another hour if you would give me the place! I shall leave immediately!"

"Well, that will save me the trouble of kicking you out!"

"Kicking me!" thundered the professor, in his big, hoarse voice. "If you dared so much as lift a foot against me, I—I—I——"

He pranced over and shook his fist fiercely beneath Mr. Merriwell's nose.

About one second later, Frank heard a racket that brought him downstairs on the double-quick.

Slam! bang! crash! The sounds that came from the library seemed to indicate that something was happening inside.

CHAPTER VII.

A STARTLING ASSERTION.

Frank pushed open the door, and sprang into the room.

The professor and Uncle Asher were engaged in a rough-and-tumble battle, and, having been enraged to a point that was far beyond his endurance, Scotch was giving Mr. Merriwell a very lively tussle.

They had upset a table, smashed a lamp, broken glass from the door of a bookcase, and done other damage, but they kept right on at each other merrily.

"Call me a lunatic, will you!" shouted Mr. Merriwell, as he hit the professor a good one on his injured eye. "Accuse me of being friendly with Dr. Mary Walker! Whoop!"

"Call me a fool, will you!" roared the professor, striking back blindly. "Threaten to kick me out of the house, will you! I'll be avenged, or I will perish in the attempt!"

Frank rushed forward, crying:

"Stop, Uncle Asher! Stop, professor! This is disgraceful! There is some mistake!"

"That's right!" howled Uncle Asher. "You made a mistake in bringing such a creature into my house!"

"And you made a mistake in calling me a fool!" bellowed Professor Scotch. "Is this the mild and gentle uncle you told me about, boy? He is a perfect old cannibal!"

"If this little pirate is your favorite instructor, I am going to keep you away from Fardale Academy," declared Frank's uncle.

At this moment they both tripped and fell, but Professor Scotch was again underneath.

The back of the professor's head struck the floor with such violence that he was stunned; and when he recovered he found himself in bed, with the village doctor in attendance.

"Is there any hope for death, doctor?" asked the professor, hollowly, when he found the man at the bedside was a physician. "I trust I am in no danger of recovering?"

"You will be all right to-morrow," assured the physician, in a manner intended to be cheerful. "You are shaken up and bruised, as if you had passed through a railroad accident; but, although you may be lame and stiff for a day or two, you will eventually come out all right. You have a strong constitution."

"And must I remain beneath this roof a single night?"

"You must not leave this bed till I call again. Your condition demands absolute rest. I have left here on this stand at the head of the bed liniments and lotions, and have given young Mr. Merriwell full directions for their application. It will be several days before the discoloration will entirely leave your eyes."

"Doctor."

"Well, sir?"

"Did I kill him?"

"Whom?"

"That infernal old fiend who assaulted me with a bootjack, and attempted to assassinate me with a loaded revolver?"

"Mr. Merriwell?"

"Yes."

"He does not seem to be harmed at all."

"Then let me die, doctor!"

"Nonsense! You must be crazy! Why, Mr. Merri-

well says it was all an accident. You need rest. Here, take this powder."

The doctor forced Scotch to swallow the powder, and it was not long before the professor sunk into deep slumber.

In the meantime Frank was doing his best to soothe his uncle's ruffled feelings.

"This man may die, Uncle," he said. "You have assaulted him in a terrible manner."

"He brought it on himself!" shouted Asher, walking wildly up and down amid the ruins of the library. "Why, the wretch even accused me of being friendly with Dr. Mary Walker!"

"Then he must have misunderstood me. I have always known that you regarded Dr. Mary Walker with scorn, and I said something about it to the professor on the train. He may have thought that I said you were friendly with her."

"He upheld the new woman, and he even went so far as to say that he thought it would be a fine thing for women to wear male attire! He ought to die!"

"Now, I am quite sure the professor holds views exactly the opposite, and so I am led to infer that he misunderstood me again, for I spoke of your ideas on this point."

"Well, in case he prevaricated, he deserves what he got. Look at the ruin he wrought here! Fifty dollars will not begin to replace the articles broken."

"In case Professor Scotch should die, it would be proved that you assaulted him with a loaded revolver, and you might find yourself in serious trouble."

Uncle Asher began to look worried.

"Oh, there can't be any likelihood of his dying."

"I don't know about that. You handled him very

roughly. I shall remain in suspense till the doctor reports."

By the time the doctor came down from the room in which the professor lay asleep Uncle Asher had grown quite nervous and alarmed. He immediately rushed at the physician and asked:

"How is he? Will he pull through all right?"

"Well, it is possible," replied the physician, catching a significant wink from Frank. "But I advise you to patch matters up with him some way, Mr. Merriwell."

"Patch up? What do you mean?"

"I mean that you have given him a severe shaking up, and he may take a notion to make you pay for it."

"How, sir—how?"

"By suing you for damages. He has the marks to show, and he could make a very strong case."

The doctor then gave Frank a few instructions concerning the professor, and departed.

Uncle Asher was in anything but a pleasant frame of mind.

"Fate is against me," he said. "Everything has gone wrong since the first visitation."

Frank looked at his uncle keenly, but the man seemed perfectly sane, although agitated.

"What do you mean by 'the first visitation?'" he asked. "In your letter you spoke of a visitation."

Mr. Merriwell glanced nervously about.

"I will tell you, Frank," he said. "I must tell you without delay. But I must have something to steady my nerves. Sit down. I will tell you the story when I return."

In a short time Uncle Asher came back, looking as if he felt better. But he did not immediately begin with his explanation. Instead, he walked nervously up and down the library floor till Frank said:

"I am waiting, uncle."

"Eh? Yes, I know, but it is not an easy thing to begin on. You are not superstitious, my boy?"

"Not in the least."

"You do not believe in ghosts?"

"No, sir."

"I knew it. It was not so very long ago that I did not believe in them."

"And you do now?" asked Frank.

"Well, I have been forced to," was the reluctant confession. "I know this house is haunted, for I have seen the ghost."

"Nonsense!"

"There is no nonsense about it," firmly returned Asher Merriwell. "My boy, your father is dead; but for three nights in succession his disembodied spirit has entered my chamber and been seen by my eyes!"

CHAPTER VIII.

STORY OF THE SPECTRE.

Frank leaped to his feet.

"Uncle Asher, you are mad!" he hoarsely cried.

The old man shook his head.

"I knew you would think me deranged," he said; "but I am not. I have spoken the solemn truth."

"But such a thing is utterly impossible!"

"So I have always believed until convinced by my own eyes and my own ears."

Frank was distressed. Mr. Merriwell seemed to be perfectly sane, and yet the boy shrank from him.

"Sit down again," urged Uncle Asher. "Let's try to be calm. I knew I should distress you, and, at first, I resolved not to tell you. But the repeated appearance of the spectre led me to change my mind. I accepted it as a warning of my coming end, and I felt that it was my duty to tell you all."

The man had grown calm, but now it was the boy who paced excitedly up and down the room. At length Frank came and stood before his uncle, saying:

"Tell me what you have seen."

"On the first night I was aroused by the sound of some one moving about. At first I thought it might be a trick of my imagination, and I tried to go to sleep. But, as I lay in a doze, I distinctly heard light footsteps pass my door. That brought me out of bed in a moment, for I thought burglars might be in the house. Grasping my revolver, I slipped out of the room into the corridor,

which, as you know, leads from the head of the stairs to the rear of the house. I moved silently and cautiously. It was dark in the corridor, from the farther end of which came a slight rustle. Then, as I stood there, something seemed to vanish into the room where your mother died."

The man stopped, his voice having grown husky. Frank was now quite pale, but was holding his excitement in check. He made a motion for Uncle Asher to continue.

After some moments, Mr. Merriwell went on:

"I stole down the corridor, and found the door of that chamber slightly ajar. The moon was shining, and its light sifted in at the window. By the light of the moon I distinctly saw a figure standing at the dressing-case—a figure clad in white. For all that there was something ghostly about it, I still believed it a burglar."

He cleared his throat, and the lad waited impatiently for him to continue.

"This intruder was searching through the old dressing-case. I watched him for several moments, and then I cocked the revolver which I held in my hand. The click-click of the weapon caused him to start and turn. Then the moonlight fell full and fair on his white, ghastly face, and I saw it was my brother Charles!"

Asher Merriwell was now shaking with excitement, and his voice choked.

A strange, uncanny feeling began to creep over the listening lad. Somehow, despite himself, he could not shake off a sensation of awe and terror.

After a few moments, the man recovered and pursued his narrative.

"The sight of that familiar face seemed to turn the blood in my veins to water. I cried out, calling my dead

brother's name, and clasping my hands to my eyes, staggering backward, the revolver falling to the floor.

"When I recovered, which was in a moment, I looked for the spectre, but it had vanished. It was gone, and yet I knew no one had left the chamber by the door, which stood open before me. Then I began to think I had been tricked by my imagination. I began to believe I had seen nothing at all."

"Which must serve as the real explanation of the affair," said Frank, quickly.

Mr. Merriwell shook his head.

"Not at all. Wait till you have heard the complete story."

"Go on. I am listening."

"It did not take me long to recover my nerve. I entered the room, revolver in hand, but found nothing to reward my search. Besides myself, there was no human being there.

"Of course, I had grown much calmer when I went back to bed. I decided that I must be ill, and I would call in the doctor the next day. I took a small drink of brandy, and was soon sleeping soundly. During the remainder of that night I was not disturbed.

"With the coming of morning, I decided that I had been troubled by a nightmare. I was inclined to laugh at myself; but, for all that, what I had seen was vividly fixed in my memory. It seemed to follow me through all the day.

"But I ate well and felt well, so I did not call a physician.

"I wondered if another night would bring forth anything of an uncanny nature. Something seemed to tell me that it would, and I retired with a feeling of dread, which I tried in vain to banish. It was some time before I fell asleep, but I slept soundly at length.

"It was exactly two o'clock, when I suddenly found myself wide awake. I knew not why I had awakened from deep slumber, but I felt that something had aroused me. The illumined face of the little clock on the stand at the head of the bed told me the hour.

"For some minutes I lay and listened, but I heard no sound. Still I was impressed with the conviction that some one or something was astir in the house. I could not sleep again without investigating, and so I got out of bed.

"Once more, with the revolver in hand, I crept from my room and stole down the corridor. Gently I pushed open the door of the chamber in which I had seen the apparition the night before. Something made me expect to see it there again, and I was not disappointed.

"As on the previous occasion, the moonlight was shining in at the window, and it showed me the figure in white. As on the previous occasion, the spectre seemed to be searching through the old dressing-case.

"Lifting the revolver, I cried:

" 'Stand still, or I will shoot you in your tracks!'

"Again he turned, and again I saw the death-set face of my brother! I felt my strength oozing from my body. I was fascinated by the eyes which seemed fixed on me with a stony stare. Slowly the revolver sunk to my side.

"Then the spectre lifted a hand with a warning gesture, and, without a sound, glided into the alcove in that room and disappeared. I seemed to hear a faint scraping sound, but that was all. I was alone.

"I do not know how I summoned courage to go in there and investigate a second time, but I did so, and the only satisfaction it gave me was to discover the room was deserted, save for myself."

Frank Merriwell was breathing quickly, fitfully, his

face hard and pale. The words of his uncle were making a deep impression on him.

Now Mr. Merriwell once more sought relief from his feelings by walking swiftly up and down the floor. Frank waited in silence till the man continued:

"I went back to bed, but I did not sleep. I tossed and turned, my mind troubled with a conflict of thoughts and emotions. I began to believe that the apparition had come as a warning of something soon to befall me. My thoughts grew morbid, and a great fear came upon me. I am an old man, and my course is nearly finished."

"No, no, uncle!" cried Frank, quickly; "you are still in the very prime of life. You have a score of good years before you."

"Uncle Asher forced a faint smile.

"I am fifty-nine," he said. "In our family there have ever been two classes. One class was slender, supple, sinewy, hard as iron, and blessed with long lives, barring accidents. To that class your father and yourself belong. The other class was stout, thick-necked, sluggish of blood and inclined to apoplexy. Nearly all of them have died from fifty-eight to sixty-two. That is the class to which I belong."

It was useless for Frank to try to convince Uncle Asher that this was all a whim.

"I know, my dear boy—I know," declared the man. "For some time I have been thinking of making certain provisions for you, in case I should be taken away suddenly."

"I am all right, uncle."

"I know it, but you are all I have in the world. When I am gone, you shall inherit my wealth."

"Don't speak of that!"

"I must speak of it, for the time has come. Merriwell is a good old name, and through you it must go down

to posterity. I want to see you educated, or want to know that your complete education is assured. For that reason, I asked you to bring one of your instructors with you. I have a scheme of adding to your complete education by travel, and I wished you to see the world in company with a highly intellectual tutor. I am greatly disappointed in Professor Scotch, and——"

"You may not be so disappointed when you come to know the professor better."

"Oh, he is not the man to satisfy me."

"Wait and see. But you have not completed your ghost story, uncle."

"So I haven't. There is not much more to tell. I found myself in a rather shaken condition in the morning. I called in the doctor, and asked him what it meant when a person got to seeing spooks. He said it meant their liver was out of order, and he gave me some medicine. This medicine, however, did not prevent the spectre's appearance on the third night."

"Did it appear in the same manner?"

"No. This time it visited me in my own chamber."

Frank whistled.

"This grows still more exciting!"

"Yes. As you may fancy, I did not find it easy to go to sleep on the third night, and I took the utmost care to lock my chamber door. I did not mean to arise and go spectre-hunting again, no matter how strong the inclination might be. But I did not have to do so.

"Again it was two o'clock when I awoke; but this time I looked up and saw the spectre at my bedside. It was standing there quietly, and seemed waiting for me to awaken. The moment I opened my eyes, it lifted a hand, and then, in a faint, far-away whisper, came these words:

" 'Brother Asher, where is the mystic ring—the ring I

gave my wife, and told her to keep till I called for it? I have called at last!'"

A cry broke from Frank's lips.

"The ring—there it is!" he cried, holding up his hand, and showing a strangely twisted band of gold, in which an odd black stone was set. "My mother gave it to me when she died. She told me to keep it always. It has caused me a great deal of trouble, of which I have not written you a full account, as I did not wish to worry you. First, complete your story, and then I will tell you about this ring."

Mr. Merriwell looked closely at the old ring, and then he huskily said:

"This is the ring for which he called. He described it. I told him that it was not in my possession."

"And then—what?"

"He stepped back from sight, I heard a click, and when I sat up in bed, shaking with fright, he was gone."

"Then you wrote me to come home without delay?"

"Yes. I accepted these visitations as a warning of my approaching end."

"Nonsense, uncle! However, I am glad you wrote me to come. You were not visited last night?"

"No."

"I may be able to solve the mystery. I have a favor to ask."

"Name it, my boy, and it shall be granted."

"I want to spend to-night in the chamber where you first saw the spectre!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE STRANGE RING.

Mr. Merriwell was greatly agitated.

"My boy, you cannot know what experience you might have to go through!" he cried.

"I shall be ready for anything," assured Frank.

"But—but—that chamber—your mother died there."

A look of pain passed over the lad's face. He turned away for a moment, and then slowly said:

"I know. Possibly that is why this—this—spectre visits that room."

"Without doubt."

"Then I shall not mind—I shall not be easily frightened."

Uncle Asher hesitated.

"Remember, uncle, you told me to name my favor and it should be granted."

"I spoke hastily."

"But you will not refuse me now?"

"It is of you that I am thinking; there could be nothing selfish in such a refusal."

"And it is of you that I am thinking, dear uncle. If I can succeed in solving this mystery——"

"My boy, there is no solution. I have seen my brother's spirit, and you would simply behold that of your father. Isn't it better that you should not venture to look upon it."

"But Uncle Asher, I have the ring, and it belongs to him. He did not call for it while he lived, and now——"

"I see, I see; you think that you may 'lay' the spectre by surrendering the ring."

This was not what Frank had thought, but he did not care to make a full explanation just then.

Some time before, he had written his uncle how the ring had been stolen from him, and, in trying to escape from pursuers, the thief had fallen into an old quarry and been killed; but he had not thought it best at that time to explain that the fine lines cut on the black stone were really a chart to a lost gold mine that was situated somewhere in the Santa Catarina Mountains, in Arizona.

Now, however, he told his uncle the full truth about the ring, and showed the chart which he had had drawn on paper by one who had copied and enlarged the marking on the strange stone in the ring.

Quite naturally, Asher Merriwell was greatly interested. He looked the chart over carefully, and then he examined the ring. He asked many questions, ending with:

"And you really mean to give up this ring?"

"It belonged to my father."

"True."

"He asked mother to keep it until he called for it."

"Yes."

"He did not call for it while mother lived."

"No."

"And now that he has called, should he not receive it?"

"What value can that ring be to a spectre?"

"Oh, I cannot answer that. You have not yet given me an answer."

"I will not. Boy, your mother gave you that ring, told you to keep it, and you must do with it as you believe is right and proper. I shall not try to dictate in the matter. The events of the last few nights have shaken me

severely. I am not myself—I am not capable of giving good advice. I scarcely know what I think or feel."

"You need a rest, Uncle—or, better still, you need a change. You should go away on some kind of a diversion-seeking expedition. But, let me hear you agree that I may sleep in that chamber to-night."

"Do as you choose, Frank. You may regret it—I may regret that I permitted it."

"I scarcely think you will."

A little later Toots arrived from the station with the trunks, which the hostler aided him in bringing into the house.

Frank went up and saw Professor Scotch, finding him sleeping peacefully, with one eye bandaged and the other slightly discolored.

"Poor old professor!" laughed Frank, softly. "He has had a sorry time since leaving the academy. Another such day would be his death. He must be given a chance to rest and recuperate."

Leaving the professor, he sought Toots, whom he directed to go and sit with the unfortunate man, assuring the darky that he would make it all right with Mr. Merriwell.

Thus it came about that, when Professor Scotch opened his eyes, he looked straight at Toots, who was in the act of taking a sip from a suspicious-looking bottle.

Seeing that he was detected, Toots exclaimed:

"Golly!"

Professor Scotch instantly sat up in bed.

"Look here, my brunette friend," he cried, "what have you in that bottle?"

"Med'c'ne fo' mah cold, sar," replied Toots, speaking hoarsely, and beginning to cough.

The professor sniffed the air.

"Seems to me I recognize that odor," he muttered. "I am sure I cannot be deceived."

"Wouldn't deceibe yo' fo' de worl', sar," assured the agitated darky.

"Look here, Toots!" rumbled Scotch, in his deep, awe-inspiring voice, "I think I need a little of that medicine myself."

"No, sar—no, sar!" cried Toots, in alarm. "Dis am bad fo' white fo'ks—'deed it am! It am 'speshully bad fo' p'ofessors, sar. It am deadly po'son fo' p'ofessors."

"Well, Toots, I have decided to commit suicide. Bring forward the poison!"

Toots' teeth began to chatter and his eyes to roll.

"Su-su-sar," he stammered, "I done don' like to refuse a gemmen, sar; but dis is a case whar de gen'ral health ob de communerty done deman' it, sar. If yo' took one li'l tinty drap ob dis p'oson, sar, it would be shore deff, an' I might be hung fo' yo' murdah."

"Now, that won't go with me, you black pilferer!" roared the professor. "You confiscated that bottle and its contents from Mr. Merriwell, and I shall report your offence if you do not immediately hand it over to me."

"An' yo' won't repo'te it if I gib yo' de bottle?"

"No, I will keep mum."

"Well, jes' let me hab one mo' good swaller ob dis med'c'ne, an' I will gib it up."

"Stop!" commanded Scotch, sharply. "Not another swallow till I have analyzed the contents of that bottle. You have taken it at random from the wine-cellar, and, as it was put up especially for white folks, it may be poison for darkies."

"Good land! I nebber fought ob dat," cried Toots, as he quickly surrendered the bottle.

The professor held it between his unbandaged eye and the window.

"Now," said he, soberly, "we will begin the analysis. First, it looks like brandy."

He smelled of it.

"It smells like brandy," he declared.

He took a good pull at the bottle.

"It tastes like brandy," he said, with a catch in his breath and a look of deep satisfaction. "I believe it is brandy. I'll try it again, just to make sure."

He did try it again, and the way he allowed the fiery stuff to gurgle down his throat caused Toots to clasp his hands and murmur:

"Fo' de lan' sakes!"

"Yes," said the professor, gasping for breath, "that is brandy. According to my analysis, it is a very fine grade of brandy. But I thought Mr. Merriwell was a temperance worker? I thought he believed in putting down this kind of stuff?"

"By golly! He does," grinned Toots. "Yo' ought to see him put it do'n when he feels dat way!"

"I am shocked—I am surprised!" asserted the professor. "Now, I believe in the use of liquor for purely medicinal purposes—nothing else, nothing else. I am rather ill at the present time, and brandy is, without doubt, exactly what I need. I'll take a little more."

Toots coughed.

"Dis yere cole ob mine is po'erful bad," he said.

"Rum and molasses is a very good mixture for a cold," said the professor, glibly. "Of course, I would not recommend it for children, but it very good for a mature person like yourself."

"How about brandy, p'ofessor?"

"Avoid it, sir—avoid it! It will do for one whose system is in a badly shattered condition, but should not be indulged in by a young man."

The bottle was again inverted, and it remained thus till the last of its contents had disappeared.

"What have they chucked me into bed for?" the professor continued. "I am not ready to retire. What time do they dine in this house, Tootsie?"

"Berry soon, sar—berry soon."

"Is that so? Well, they won't leave Professor Horace Orman Tyler Scotch out this evening. I propose to arise, don my raiment, and dine."

"But de doctah——"

"Hang the doctor, Tootsie, old boy! Doctors are necessary evils. I am my own boss. Help me out of bed. That's it, so. Now I am all right. Give me some assistance in getting into my garments. Going to dine without me, eh? Well, I should smile!"

With Toots to aid, the professor succeeded in getting dressed, after which he washed his face and hands, combed his hair after a fashion, cast aside the cloth that had been bound over his eye, and declared that he was ready to descend to the dining-room.

CHAPTER X.

PURSUING A PROWLER.

Frank and his uncle had seated themselves at the table, and soup had been served, when Professor Scotch came prancing into the dining-room, with Toots close behind.

"Excuse me," said the professor, with a flourish. "I have fallen into the extravagant habit of eating occasionally myself. Of course, I do not wish to intrude——"

"Hem! hem!" coughed Uncle Asher, embarrassed. "We presumed you were too—too tired to come down."

"Well, hardly; but if I am not wanted——"

There was something about the professor's manner that caused Asher Merriwell to burst into hearty laughter.

"Professor Scotch," he cried, "I believe I have misunderstood you—I am beginning to understand that you are a practical joker."

It was not long before the professor was seated at the table, and the way he stowed away the food told that he was decidedly hungry. For all that he seemed to drink quite freely, he did not show it more than when he sat down, and Uncle Asher drank several glasses with him.

Then they both turned to and gave Frank a temperance lecture. The professor insisted that he took liquor for medicinal purposes only, and Uncle Asher declaring it had been recommended for his use in moderate quantities by his physician.

But Frank did not stand in need of a lecture, for he never touched the stuff in any form, and he had made up his mind that he never would. He was one of those boys who seldom break a resolution.

But the brandy which Toots had pilfered from the wine cellar had served to restore peace and amity between Mr. Merriwell and the professor. By the time the meal was over they were ready to embrace each other, and Frank left them smoking and chatting together.

He walked over to the village in the dusk of early evening, and met a number of his friends and schoolmates, all of whom regarded him with awe and admiration.

Frank surely did cut a fine figure in his handsome cadet uniform, and it was not strange that his less fortunate companions of other days regarded him with awe, and were somewhat doubtful as to the proper manner of approaching him.

But Merriwell was not the lad to forget old friends, and he greeted them all heartily and cordially, soon putting them at ease by showing that he was the same boy that they had known in other days.

During his furlough the village boys often gathered round Frank to listen to his tales of cadet life at Fardale, and in the breast of more than one lad he awakened a great longing to become a student at some military academy.

When Frank strolled back home on the evening of his arrival, darkness had come on, and banks of dark clouds were lying far down in the west, where the lightning played at intervals, and the thunder muttered. There was a great hush in the air.

As Frank came near his home, he saw a dark figure leave the road a short distance in advance, and enter the grounds.

He hurried forward, curious to know who was prowling about the place at that hour.

The figure hesitated, seemed to look back, and then hurried onward swiftly.

"Hello, there!" called Frank. "Wait a minute!"

At the sound of his voice, the figure took to flight, plunging straight through a hedge.

"That's wrong!" muttered the boy. "I wonder if I can't overtake you." And he sprang away in pursuit.

Across the grounds darted the unknown, plunged through a rustic arbor, and darted round the corner of the house.

"Stop!" ordered Frank; "stop where you are!"

The fugitive did not heed.

Round the corner leaped the boy who was the best sprinter in Fardale Academy. He was gaining.

"You can't get away!" he hissed, through his set teeth.

Two more leaps took him so close to the unknown that he reached out a hand to grasp the fellow's shoulder.

Just then Frank tripped and fell heavily to the ground.

The shock was sufficient to stun him, but he got up as swiftly as possible.

Then he looked in amazement.

The unknown had disappeared.

CHAPTER XI.

A REVELATION.

That night Frank slept in the haunted chamber. Of course the surroundings brought a flood of sad memories to overwhelm him, but he resolutely put them aside, and he read for more than an hour after retiring to the room.

He did not undress, but flung himself on the bed, and drew the outer spread over him.

He left the window open, in order to obtain plenty of fresh air.

Close at hand were matches and a lamp.

His first thought had been not to sleep at all, and he had believed that, considering his surroundings, this would not be difficult.

Even when he had extinguished the light and lay there in the darkness, he did not intend to sleep.

The thunder-shower that had threatened earlier in the evening had passed around, and the later hours of the night, when the moon had risen, promised to be pleasant and peaceful.

Outside, the night breezes were whispering amid the trees. Far away in the village a dog howled.

For some time Frank lay listening and thinking. He tried to direct his thoughts, and succeeded in a measure; but, without being aware that he was growing drowsy, he finally fell asleep.

The hours of the night slipped away. The moon rose and threw its light into the eastern window, but the bed was in the shadow, and Frank Merriwell slept as softly and peacefully as a child.

At length Frank dreamed. He thought that within the alcove at the farther side of the chamber where he now lay he saw the partition slowly and noiselessly open till the aperture was wide enough to admit a man. Then into the room stepped the spectre of the old mansion, and, with noiseless step, glided to the dressing-case. As it passed through the full light of the moon, Frank saw the face of the apparition, and it was in truth that of his dead father.

In a moment Frank's eyes opened, and he lay quite still on the bed, looking directly toward the dressing-case.

Had he dreamed? Was he still dreaming?

Before the dressing-case stood a figure in white—the figure of a man who was searching through the drawers of the old case.

The boy on the bed held his breath and watched. He could hear a rustling sound as the drawers were moved.

To Frank it seemed that he lay thus for several minutes. At length the ghostly figure made a gesture of impatience and despair, and the boy distinctly heard these words:

"I know the secret drawer is here somewhere, but I cannot find the hidden spring."

With the stealth of a creeping cat, Frank Merriwell slipped from the bed to the floor. He was in his stockings, and he made no sound.

Then the boy did something that told of his wonderful nerve. Slowly, surely, step by step, he crept up behind the ghostly visitor to that chamber.

It was no simple thing to retain his nerve, for he was oppressed with a great desire to rush from the room. This he fought against and conquered.

If the thing was, indeed, a spectre, Frank did not believe he could be harmed by it. If it was not a spectre——

"I will soon know!" he thought, as he nerved himself to spring upon the intruder.

He was very near, and he crouched for the spring. If he encountered anything solid and material, he would cling to it and shout for aid.

Just as he was on the point of making the leap, the man turned about squarely, and they were face to face!

The moonlight fell fairly on the ghostly-appearing visitor—fell full upon his face.

Frank saw that it was, indeed, the face of his father—ghastly pale and fear-inspiring.

In a moment Frank Merriwell was frozen to the spot, chained fast by a power he could not resist, and boy and man stared into each other's eyes.

After a time, Frank succeeded in hoarsely whispering:

"My father—it is my father!"

The "ghost" recoiled, as if struck a blow in the face.

"Frank, my boy!"

That was enough for Frank Merriwell. In a moment he was done with doubts and fears.

"You are no disembodied spirit!" he cried, joyously. "You are my father—alive!"

"Hush, boy—hush! You will be heard! It will bring others to this room!"

Frank was determined to satisfy himself beyond the last shadow of a doubt. Swiftly he reached forward and caught the man by the arm.

That was quite enough. It was no apparition; it was a creature of flesh and blood.

"But—but," stammered the boy, astounded, dazed, wondering, "you should be dead!"

"I am dead to the world," was the solemn reply. "Charles Conrad Merriwell is as dead as if his body lay beneath six feet of earth!"

"But the reports of your death—the proofs! We had them all. Mother believed you dead."

"I know it."

Frank fell back a step.

"You deceived her!" he cried, passionately. "Why did you do such a terrible thing?"

The man lifted his hands to his head.

"Don't shrink from me, my boy!" he entreated. "Fate has been against me—the whole world has been against me. It was even reported that I was a gambler; but it was not true, Frank—I swear it was not true! I may have foolishly risked the money that I had—I have done so—but I never wronged any one."

"Why were you always away from home?"

"I will tell you. You know that my father failed, leaving Asher and myself to fight our battles with the world. I was always something of a dreamer, and I believed that, some day, I should come suddenly into a great fortune. I dreamed of buying back this old place—it was the vision that lured me to the golden West, made me a miner, wanderer, fortune hunter. I got the fever in my blood—I swore I would never know rest till I struck it rich and was able to return to the East a wealthy man. I had been scorned for my poverty by people who should have been my friends; even Brother Asher told me I lacked ambition and would never amount to anything. I resolved to show them that they were all wrong."

He paused a moment, moistened his lips with his tongue, and then went on swiftly:

"It was not strange that lies should have been told about me. I did not wonder at that—I did not mind it. I kept up the wearisome hunt for gold. Several times I thought I had struck it rich; but each time this hope was born to die. I became desperate. I would not give up.

"One day I came upon a starving miner in the Santa

Catarina Mountains, Arizona. He had been thrown from his horse, and his leg was broken. He was delirious, and he raved of a rich mine, to which a ring that he wore on his hand could guide one who knew the secret of the ring. Before I could get him to the nearest town he died, and I was obliged to bury him in the wilds of the mountains. In his last moments he was sane, and he gave me the ring. He told me how to read the secret upon it.

"I placed the ring upon my hand and wore it into a place called Pirate Hole. It was a wicked little camp, and I had not been there an hour before I was set upon by two men who demanded the ring, and then, when I refused to give it up, attempted to murder me. I escaped with my life, but I was sorely wounded. I clung to the ring.

"From that hour murderous ruffians were constantly on my trail, always trying to get possession of that ring. I was never safe. I fled like a hunted fox, and like hounds they kept on my track. Time after time I narrowly escaped death.

"At length I came East, and placed the ring in my wife's keeping, telling her to hide it where it would be safe. I resolved to go back and fight. I did go back. I was captured, held a captive for three months, and tortured to force me to reveal the place where I had hidden the ring; but I kept my secret, and escaped.

"Assailed by one of my foes, I killed him in self-defense. Then the others swore to have me hanged. I was charged with murder, and I knew my chances were slim, even though I was forced to kill the man to save myself from death. They had me cornered, trapped. Then it was that I died."

The man paused again. Frank was fascinated, held spell-bound.

"Then it was that I died," repeated Charles Merriwell. "With the aid of a friend, I worked the plot very well. I took a drug that threw me into a trance that resembled death. I was placed in a coffin, where I was seen by many. The coffin was sealed and buried, but I was not in it when it was placed in the ground. I had been removed and restored to consciousness.

"Thus it came about that Charles Conrad Merriwell died. Now you understand it all. I have been waiting till my enemies should perish, and now they are all gone. I have come back here for the ring I gave your mother, but I have been unable to find it."

CHAPTER XII.

THE LAST OF THE SPECTRE.

Frank had listened with unbounded amazement to this remarkable story from his father's lips. It seemed almost beyond belief, and yet here was the man whom the world believed dead, and that he was alive and in the flesh the boy well knew.

"But why should you fail to let Uncle Asher know that you still live?" asked Frank.

Charles Merriwell made a gesture that the lad did not understand. He bowed his head a moment, and then slowly replied:

"Asher has never felt a great amount of brotherly love for me. He believed the lies they told about me, and it is not strange that I felt resentment. I am still a poor man, although I am sure the ring could lead me to a fortune. If I were to let Asher know how I have deceived him—if I were to tell him the whole truth, he would be likely to still regard me as of old. I fancy he would scorn me for my subterfuge. No, I wish him to continue to believe me dead. You must not tell him of this meeting to-night—you must promise me that you will not tell. Do you promise?"

"If it is necessary, father, I will give my promise."

"It is necessary."

"Then I promise."

"Some time I hope to tell him the full truth myself, but I mean to find the lost mine of the Santa Catarinas before I do."

"How are you going to find it without the aid of the ring?"

"How, indeed!"

The man bowed his head upon his breast.

Frank slipped the ring from his finger, and quietly said:

"Here it is—father."

The ring was placed in the man's hand. He uttered a cry of unbounded joy and astonishment.

"The ring!" he panted, eagerly, holding it in the moonlight for inspection. "It is truly the ring!"

"Yes; it was given me by mother when she was dying. She believed you dead, and she told me to keep it always. But, had she known you still lived, I am sure she would have wished me to return it to you when you called for it!"

"You are right, my son—you are right!"

As briefly as possible, Frank told how the ring had been stolen from him, and how the mysterious man had plunged to his death while fleeing from pursuers.

Charles Merriwell was puzzled; he could not conceive who the mysterious thief could have been.

"I shall return to the West, and I shall not rest till I have found the lost mine of the Santa Catarinas," he declared. "When I am wealthy, you shall hear from me, Frank. After this night Asher Merriwell will not be troubled by the spectre of his dead brother."

"How is it that you can enter this house and move about without detection?" asked the still wondering lad.

"It is because I know the secret of the old place. To-night, as I entered the grounds, I was pursued and nearly overtaken——"

"I was the pursuer."

"You?"

"Yes."

"Well, I must say that you are lively on your feet, my boy. If you had not fallen, you must have overtaken me. But I escaped you and entered by the secret way. There are passages within these heavy walls, and sliding panels that open into many of the rooms. That explains the secret of my appearances and disappearances. I did not wish to be shot for a burglar by any one who might run upon me by accident, and so I donned this white flannel suit and powdered my face. I have nearly frightened Asher out of his wits, but I am sure I kept him from taking a shot at me."

"Why did you come to this room so often?"

"I learned this was the chamber in which your mother died. I know there is a secret drawer in this old dresser, and I was searching for that drawer, thinking I might find the ring hidden therein. I did not see you on the bed when I entered a short time ago. How came you in this room?"

Frank told how Uncle Asher had sent for him and told him of the ghostly visitor in the house, and how he had asked to spend the night in that chamber, so he might see the spectre.

"You are a very nervy lad," declared the man, in admiration. "There is the right kind of stuff in you. I am greatly indebted to Asher for all he has done for you; but I will pay him every dollar he has spent, and remunerate him for his trouble. You shall be rich some day, my son; the lost mine of the Santa Catarinas shall pour its golden treasure into your hands."

"What do I care for the treasure, father; I had much rather have you! Why do you return to that wild land of murderous men? Why not stay here, and spend the remainder of your life in peace?"

Charles Merriwell shook his head.

"In that way I could prove myself the worthless crea-

ture my own brother has been fain to confess me. No, Frank, I must go back. The future cannot have so many perils as I have safely passed in the past. Nothing could keep me here, now that I have this ring."

In his heart Frank felt well satisfied that his father should make this reply to his appeal.

When everything was made clear, and they understood each other, they finally sat down together. Till the night was far spent and dawn was at hand they sat and talked in low tones, holding each other's hand. Frank told his father all about himself, his fortunes, and his plans. They spoke of the future, but as to that neither knew nor dreamed what things lay before them.

The first faint streaks of gray had begun to show in the east when the man and boy bade each other an affectionate farewell.

Then Charles Merriwell slipped through the opening in the wall made by the panel, which closed behind him, and Frank was alone.

In the morning, Frank's uncle eagerly asked the boy if he had not seen the "spectre."

"I saw no spectre," was Frank's truthful reply. "And I do not believe the place is haunted, uncle."

"Then I must be insane!" spluttered the owner of the Elms. "I saw it with my own eyes, and you will see it, if you remain long enough."

"I am willing to sleep in that room every night during my furlough."

"You may sleep there till you are frightened out."

"Which will not be this year, uncle."

"We'll see, sir—we'll see."

"All right; you shall see."

So Frank remained in the chamber, but the spectre was never again seen at the Elms.

Uncle Asher and the professor became great cronies.

Many were the practical jokes Frank played on them, aided sometimes by Toots; but nothing could bring them to another battle.

Hans came over and spent several days with Frank, and they made things howl around the Elms. The Dutch boy and the darky proved very diverting to Frank, for whom the time passed very swiftly.

Still Frank did not regret when his furlough was ended, and the day arrived for the return to Fardale Academy. He had received many letters from his comrades at the academy, and he knew he was greatly missed there. No one could fill his place as a leader in all athletic sports.

Before Frank left for school, Uncle Asher said to him:

"I have a plan for your future, as I stated on the day that you came home, and I think Professor Scotch will prove an excellent tutor and companion for you. I am well satisfied and pleased with him. He is not going back to Fardale at present——"

"Not going back?" cried Frank, in astonishment. "Why is that?"

One day Professor Scotch burst into the house triumphantly and exultantly waving a letter over his head.

"Hurrah!" he roared, in his hoarse voice. "The coast is clear! I shall return to Fardale."

"The coast is clear?" questioned Frank. "What do you mean by that?"

"The widow will not trouble me again."

"Is that so?"

"It is a fact."

"You don't mean that she is dead?"

"No, she isn't dead, but Professor Jenks will wish he were dead very soon, for she has married him. She didn't let the grass grow under her feet after I escaped."

"Poor old Jenks!" said Frank.

CHAPTER XIII.

FRIENDS AND FOES.

Back again to Fardale!

Frank Merriwell's furlough was over, and he had returned to the famous Military Academy.

Being still the most popular cadet in the school, he was given a royal welcome, and the boys crowded around him, eager to grasp his hand.

Of his own class there was one who drew aside and offered him no welcoming hand.

Hugh Bascomb, who had once been the bully of the academy, could not forget that they had been enemies in the past and that whenever he had plotted to injure Merriwell the tables had been turned on himself.

Bascomb had thought that he would brace up and pretend that he was glad to see Frank back, but, at the last moment, he found himself unable to play the hypocrite to that extent, so he kept by himself, and let the other lads express their pleasure at Merriwell's return.

Among the first to grasp Frank's hand and declare his pleasure was Rupert Reynolds, who had once been Bascomb's ally and backer, but who seemed to have changed into one of Merriwell's most sincere admirers.

Paul Rains was not effusive, although he shook hands. Rains was still Merriwell's strongest rival in athletics.

"It's a soight fer sore oies to see yez again, Frankie, me b'y!" cried Barney Mulloy, as he wrung Frank's hand. "It's nobody else could th' b'ys miss so much at all, at all."

"I assure you I am glad to get back," said Frank, in

his hearty, convincing way. "The old academy seems like home to me, and I feel that we all belong to one big family."

Bart Hodge was next to give Frank's fingers a strong pressure. His face wore a look of deep satisfaction, and he said, in a low tone:

"Give me an opportunity to speak with you as soon as possible, old man. Something's in the wind."

Those words aroused Frank's curiosity, and, before long, he found an opportunity to slip away from the crowd and join Hodge. Together, arm in arm, they strolled out beyond the limit of the rows of white tents, which formed the summer encampment of the cadets, and found a seat beneath the trees.

"Well, Bart," said Frank, "how have things moved since I have been away?"

"All in one direction," replied the dark-faced lad.

"What direction is that?"

"Rains."

Merriwell started and looked at his companion keenly.

"What do you mean by that?" he asked.

"I told you there was something in the wind."

"Yes."

"Rains has been at work since you went away."

"At work—how?"

"For his own advantage."

Frank's hand fell on Bart's arm.

"Tell me just exactly what you mean," he said. "What has Rains been up to?"

"Snuff. You know it was not so very long ago that he attempted to defeat you at certain things, with the hope of shaking your popularity and stepping into your shoes."

"I remember."

"Well, he has been working at that little game while you have been away, and he has made long strides. He

is much more clever than I imagined. In rowing he pulls a beautiful stroke, he is an elegant swimmer, he holds the academy record for putting the shot and throwing the hammer, and he pitched for us last Saturday when we defeated the Brighton Medical School ball team nine to four."

Frank whistled.

"By jingoes!" he exclaimed. "I didn't know the fellow was a pitcher."

"Nor did any of us; you were away, and we had to have somebody. He is left-handed and throws a swift, sure ball, so we thought it barely possible he might bother them some; they weren't in the game from start to finish. They didn't score till the seventh inning, when they made two, and they got the others in the ninth. Our half came last, and so, of course, we did not play it."

"But has he anything more than speed and a left-handed delivery?"

"Yes," replied Bart, slowly, and with apparent reluctance, "he has curves. They are neither wide nor sharp, but his left-handed delivery makes them nasty."

"Then," said Frank, with satisfaction, "he is the very fellow I need to help me out in our games. Occasionally any team will fall on a pitcher and pound him. If such a thing should happen to me, I could step out and let Rains go in. The change would be almost certain to bother the batters who went up against him."

Bart smiled in an odd way.

"That would be exactly what Rains would like," he declared. "He is not the fellow to play second fiddle to any one."

"And you think——"

"That he would do his best to throw you, and take your place as captain of the team."

"If he were chosen to captain the team, I would step

down and out. I do not want to hold the position a moment after it is thought that some other fellow is more competent."

"You are altogether too generous, Frank. You have a position that you will have to fight to maintain."

"You should know that I am capable of fighting some."

Hodge nodded.

"That's right; you are a born fighter and a natural general. The fellows acknowledge that. You will retain your present position and popularity in this school just as long as you show yourself worthy."

"I defeated Rains once."

"In certain things; but it is said that he has practiced and worked constantly from that time to this. Yesterday I was told that he had beaten your running jump by two inches, and he says he will not rest till he can beat it a foot."

"That's good stuff!" cried Frank, heartily. "A fellow with that sort of determination is a rival worth having. He will wake me up, and put me on my mettle."

Bart looked at his companion queerly.

"You are a peculiar chap, Frank Merriwell!" he exclaimed. "Are you never envious or jealous?"

"I am not perfect, by a long distance, but I do not believe in being envious or jealous, and I honor an honorable rival or foe. It is the sneak that I detest."

"Well, I do not think Rains is a sneak, but I fancy you shook hands with one not long ago."

"Is that so?"

"It is just so."

"I don't know," came slowly from Frank's lips. "It doesn't seem to me as if any of the fellows could wish me harm—any of those who shook hands with me."

"But there was one who shook your hand and hated

you at the same time—a fellow who will injure you at the first opportunity."

"Name him."

"Rupert Reynolds."

"Now, aren't you a little hard on Reynolds, Bart? You dislike him because he seconded Bascomb when I had some difficulty with the bully. Since that time Reynolds has seemed very friendly, and I think he was well converted."

"You'll find you are mistaken. That fellow is a snake in the grass, and he is waiting a good opportunity to strike you. He is playing the hypocrite now, and I detest a hypocrite. There was a time when I was your enemy, Frank, but there never was the time that you could truthfully accuse me of playing the hypocrite. I let you know what I thought of you. I won't say I did not try one or two mean tricks, but you made me heartily ashamed of them by your generosity."

"You have proved a good friend to me since, and I am inclined to believe you misjudge Reynolds. It does not seem possible the fellow is an enemy."

"Wait and see; you will find out in due time. A week from next Saturday is our field day, and you will find Rains a hot rival for all honors. At the same time, I advise you to look out for Reynolds."

"Are Rains and Reynolds friendly?"

"Somewhat."

"Are they very friendly?"

"I don't know as you can call them that, but I have seen them talking together several times."

"That's nothing strange. Almost any two fellows in the academy may be seen talking together. Why should Reynolds help Rains to throw me?"

"Because he hates you. Reynolds would like to become popular himself, but he is not built of the right stuff.

As long as he dislikes you, he would be willing to pull you down and help lift almost anybody into your place. I tell you to look out for him, old man."

"All right; I'll look out. See, some of the fellows have located me again. They are coming this way, and we won't be given a chance to chat privately any longer. You can tell me all about things later on. Come, let's go to meet them."

"All right."

So the tent-mates and chums arose and advanced to meet the group approaching.

CHAPTER XIV.

FRANK IS WARY.

"Pwhat are yez troying to do, Frankie, me b'y?" cried Barney Mulloy, as they approached. "Is it yer friends ye are troying to run away from, Oi dunno?"

"I was having a little chat with Bart," Frank replied. "What's in the atmosphere—anything new?"

"Nivver a thing," assured the Irish lad, but he gave Frank a shrewd wink that meant a great deal.

The cadets gathered around Merriwell, who noted that Barney drew a little aside, making a slight beckoning motion with his head.

At the first opportunity, Frank joined the Irish youth, who drew him a little away from the others, and swiftly said, speaking in a low, cautious tone:

"Av ye don't fale loike runnin' up against Rains, don't go to th' gym whin ye're asked. He'll be there, doin' av his pritty. Take me advoice an' soize th' felly up before ye tackle him. He manes to lay over yez this trip."

"Is it a put up job?"

"Well, something loike thot. Th' b'ys think it would be sport to see th' two av yez run up against ache other."

"What do you think, Barney?"

"Rains is roight in it, take me worrud fer thot. Ye'll do well to get in thrim before ye troy him a whirrul."

"I am rather soft from my laziness during furlough, and——"

"Harden up before ye go against Rains."

"How will it be then?"

"Frankie, me b'y, ye know phwat Oi think av yez. There don't be wan in Fardale thot is yer aquil whin ye're in trim."

"Thank you, Barney. I am glad to find you have not lost your confidence in me."

At that moment, Rupert Reynolds cried:

"Come, Merriwell, old man, let's go over to the gym. You must want to try a whirl at the clubs by this time, and you know it is a treat for us to see you juggle them."

To Barney's surprise, Frank allowed himself to be borne off toward the gymnasium.

The Irish lad followed, muttering to himself:

"Av he thinks Rains is aisy, he'll make a big mistake. Oi warned him so he wouldn't be thrapped."

Frank had no idea of being trapped, but he wished to see Rains at his best. If the fellow had made such improvement, it was best to know just how expert he had become.

There was an unusually large gathering in the gymnasium for that time of year, as the boys preferred to take their exercise out doors in warm weather.

Frank saw there was really something in the wind. The cadets seemed to understand that Rains had become an open rival of Merriwell's, and it seemed as if a rumor had gone round that the two lads would meet that afternoon in the gym.

Rains had donned tights since Frank was with him a short time before, and he was just beginning work on the bars.

"That is crafty," thought Frank. "He knows I do not believe there is any real advantage to be obtained from that kind of work, and I seldom indulge in it. He has selected my weakest point."

The spectators noted Merriwell's entrance, and there was a stir among them.

Frank joined the others, and stood watching Rains, chatting easily with the lads who flocked around him.

Rains began with the simplest feats, gradually working up to the more difficult ones, and doing everything with an ease and skill that indicated he was destined to become a master in that line.

As his feats became more intricate and difficult, occasionally applause came from the spectators, and, once or twice, Merriwell led in the hand-clapping.

"That fellow is a wonder," declared Rupert Reynolds, speaking to Frank.

"He is certainly most expert on the bars."

"I don't think he has his equal in the academy."

"I don't know as he has."

"You are something of an athlete," said Reynolds, with a hidden sneer, although outwardly showing great friendliness. "We'd like to see what you can do on the bars."

Frank smiled.

"Without doubt you would. I seldom try the bars, and I do not pretend to be an expert in that line."

"What's that?" cried Reynolds, attracting attention by his loud words. "Do you, the champion athlete of Fardale, acknowledge that you can be defeated at anything?"

"I can be defeated at many things," was the quiet reply. "I am not conceited enough to think myself the smartest fellow in the world."

"And you acknowledge that Rains can outdo you on the bars?"

"I believe he can. Not taking much interest in that kind of work, I am not well up in it."

"Well, I never thought that of you!" declared Rupert, as if greatly astonished. "I thought you set yourself up as an all-round champion."

The warm color began to glow in Frank's cheeks. He did not fancy Reynolds' words or manner, but he was a

strong believer in self-control, and so he remained calm and repressed.

"You made a mistake, Reynolds; I do not set myself up as a champion."

"But the fellows call you that."

"They have a right to do so, if they wish."

"You do not mean to say you don't intend to defend the title?"

"Defend it? Why, I am always ready to take part in friendly sports and contests, as you must know, and I usually do my best. If I am defeated, it will be by some fellow who is smarter than I am. And I assure you I shall not be churl enough to sulk over it."

This did not seem to satisfy Reynolds, who plainly wished to bring about a trial of skill between Rains and Merriwell.

"Of course there are things which you pretend to be expert at," he observed. "Just what do you consider your best hold?"

"Talking," laughed Frank. "I am exceedingly expert with my mouth, and you are the only fellow to whom I willingly surrender the palm. You keep yourself in such perfect practice that you must be an expert."

Reynolds flushed and bit his lip, hearing some of the boys laugh softly.

"You're not serious, Merriwell," he declared. "Of course you do not mean to pose as a champion if somebody else is your superior, and——"

"I have told you that I do not pose as a champion at all. You persist in misrepresenting my position, Reynolds."

"Do you dare go up against Rains in an all-round contest?" demanded Rupert, flatly.

"I expect to do so."

"When?"

"On our regular field day, if he takes part in the sports and contests."

"That is putting it off."

"Not very far."

"I believe you defeated Rains at the long running jump once on a time?"

"Well?"

"He has beaten your record."

"So I have heard."

"Say, Merriwell, old man, if you've got nerve, you'll meet him to-day and now—right here. You are both here, and there are enough fellows present to decide who is the best man. He'll jump with you, or he will do anything you like. What shall it be?"

"Nothing," replied Frank, quietly and firmly.

"Nothing! It can't be you refuse?"

"I do. You seem to forget that I have been on furlough for the last three weeks, and so must be slightly out of condition. You seem to forget that I have just returned, and I have not even had time to rest and recuperate from the journey. You seem to have an idea that you can touch my pride or vanity, and lead me into making an exhibition that will not do myself justice. I am not nearly so conceited as you appear to imagine, Reynolds, but I fancy I am shrewd enough to see through your little game. There are other days coming, and I will be on hand."

Then Frank turned away and left the gymnasium.

CHAPTER XV.

TRAINING FOR THE CONTESTS.

Frank's action was a disappointment to many, as the boys had been eager for a contest between him and Rains. Some were ready enough to hint that he had not dared face his rival, but the most of them agreed that he had shown good judgment and would be found ready enough for anything when the proper time came.

Rains said nothing. He was a fellow who seldom committed himself in words, but he had a way of looking unutterable things. When asked if he felt confident of holding his own with Merriwell in athletics, he simply smiled, but it was a smile of conscious ability.

Frank returned to his studies and his duties with new courage and enthusiasm. In the short time that he had been away he found the new cadets, or plebes, had changed greatly for the better, now being able to pass through the drills and attend to their duties with a promptness and precision that spoke well for the system at Fardale.

Frank's own company, however, of which he was first sergeant, had lost ground, if anything. Everything seemed to indicate that the officer in charge of them during his absence had lacked force, and so the boys had grown somewhat negligent and careless.

Merriwell was strict, without being overbearing. He would tolerate no negligence or laziness, and so it came about that he had occasion to reprimand several of the cadets both at drill and inspection, which, however, he

did in a quiet way that was not meant to attract general attention.

Frank's secret enemies sought to turn this against him. He was said to be "boning military" in order to make a show.

As it was not unusual for a cadet in Merriwell's position to find fault with those beneath him in rank and pick flaws where such a proceeding was quite uncalled for, it was not strange that some members of other companies were led to believe that Frank's rise in the world had given him a swelled head.

But those who knew him best could not be led to believe that he had allowed the chevrons on his sleeves to change his nature.

Hodge heard murmurs of all this, and, of course, he told Frank. Merriwell looked troubled, but said:

"If anybody is trying to injure me, it is for no just cause, and their efforts are liable to bring discomfort on their own head, as has happened in the past."

"What do you mean to do about it?" asked Bart.

"I mean to keep right about my business, and ignore it completely."

This was so much unlike Hodge's passionate, revengeful nature that it filled him with wonder.

"You are a singular fellow, Frank Merriwell," he declared. "I cannot understand you yet."

Among Frank's enemies who were working secretly and accomplishing much was Rupert Reynolds.

This fellow's father was dead, and a considerable fortune had been left to Rupert, over whom his mother was appointed guardian. His mother was illy adapted to the task, for she was of a weak and indulgent nature, and Rupert had been allowed to do about as he pleased till he was thoroughly spoiled. He spent his money lavishly,

unchecked and unrebuked by his mother, who continually kept him well supplied.

With his free use of money, it was not strange that Rupert had succeeded in gathering about him a large number of sycophantic fellows, who were delighted to help him spend his money, and whom he seemed to mold easily and quickly to his own ideas and opinions.

For the most part, this was outward seeming, as there were not a few among them who accepted his hospitality and seemed to agree with his opinions, but secretly entertained a sort of contempt for him.

Friendship bought by money is always shallow and easily broken.

Knowing he was not able to outmatch Merriwell in athletics, yet wishing to overthrow Frank in some way, Reynolds selected Rains as the instrument to accomplish his desires.

Rains was a fellow who seemed modest and retiring, but who was, in truth, exceedingly conceited. Although he never boasted, he had a way of thinking that he could accomplish almost anything, and he often regarded with scorn those who were his superiors.

He formed one of the circle who accepted Reynolds' hospitality and held Reynolds in contempt as a shallow-brained spendthrift.

Reynolds had sought to push Rains to the front while Frank was absent from the academy.

Rains pretended to be quite indifferent to any prospect of advancement over Merriwell, but he lent himself readily to Rupert's scheme, even while he seemed to be passive.

Rains had all the shrewdness that Reynolds lacked. Although he somewhat underestimated Merriwell's ability, he had encountered Frank in the past, and had been humiliated. He was determinated that, if any "accident" should prevent him from defeating Merriwell when they

came together again, he would hold a position that would not cover him with shame.

So Reynolds continued his secret work against Merriwell after the latter had returned from furlough, and Rains looked on with passive and pretended indifference.

If Hodge had told the truth, Merriwell must have seen there was an influence at work against him. After his refusal to meet Rains in the gymnasium there were a few that had greeted him heartily on his return that grew rather distant and formal.

The more Hodge saw of this the more he felt like fighting. He growled a great deal to himself, but he saw it was useless to say anything to Merriwell.

Frank was no wire-puller. He had won his popularity and standing by genuine worth and merit, and by these would he retain the position, if he retained it at all.

It must not be fancied that he did not heed the intrigues against him. The knowledge that he had enemies who were working to bring about his overthrow put him on his mettle and aroused his pride. He determined to let them know just what he was capable of doing.

For this reason, beginning with the very day after his return, he began visiting the gymnasium regularly, and set to work putting himself in the best condition possible in the short time remaining before field day.

Of course, his movements were watched, and it was but natural that he should on several occasions find Rains and Reynolds where they could watch him at work.

As soon as he made out that they were trying to size him up at everything, he began to practice a little deception on them, for he did not put forth his best efforts, although he frequently seemed to do so.

Thus it came about that Rains was led to fancy that he could match Frank or excel him in most things. In the standing and running wide jump he fancied he was

now able to defeat the lad whom he meant to rival, for Reynolds had put the tape on the marks left by Frank, and they were found to be six or eight inches under Rains' record.

Although Merriwell and Rains were certain to be the two leaders in the fieldday exercises, there were others who expected to make records for Fardale.

Hodge, Mulloy, and Dunnerwust contemplated entering for various contests, Gray and Winslow had declared their intentions to take part, and short-legged, jolly Sammy Smiles said he would "show 'em he was no snail" when it came to sprinting.

Among the plebes Ephraim Gallup, of Vermont, had expressed a determination to "show um what kind of trees makes shingles, b'gosh!" and he was said to possess remarkable strength, although he was rather slow and cumbersome in his movements.

Of course Frank had visited Inza Burrage since his return to school. That he did at the first opportunity.

Somehow Inza had heard of the rivalry against the lad she admired above all others in the academy, and she was highly indignant over it. She asserted her faith in Frank's ability to "beat them all," and she said she would be on hand to encourage him in any and every way possible.

Frank felt that, with such encouragement, he could not fail, and he told her so.

Her words led him to put every energy to the task before him, and he found very few spare moments before the day appointed for the contests came around.

CHAPTER XVI.

ON THE FIELD.

The day was perfect. The sun shone bright and warm, but a cool breeze from the sea came in and tempered the heat. It was such a day as serves to put an athlete at his best.

The country far and near knew it was field day at Fardale, and the early morning trains brought loads of spectators to the village. Later in the forenoon an excursion train brought in a mighty crowd.

Shortly after seven o'clock people began to gather at the grounds, plainly determined to obtain positions of vantage from which the exercises and feats could be witnessed.

By eight o'clock the road to Fardale village was lined with people, all headed toward the academy.

Carriages and conveyances of all sorts did a most flourishing business, and the road was soon ankle deep in dust.

The field where the parades and athletic feats were to take place had been properly inclosed. On three sides was rising ground, so that the spectators would have positions enabling them to witness everything at an advantage.

No efforts had been made to provide seats, except for certain dignitaries and people of prominence.

There was a band stand at one side of the field. It was decorated with flags, and other flags were prominently displayed at various points. The forenoon was to be given to military drills and displays, which were to commence promptly at nine o'clock.

Before that hour arrived the field was surrounded on three sides by a great throng, all eager, expectant, and excited. Sentinels patrolled the lines and kept the crowd back.

The spectators were not allowed to close in on the side nearest the encampment, which was kept clear and open.

Shortly before nine the raised seats for dignitaries were filled. Professor Gunn and his faculty filed in, accompanied by numerous honored guests, among whom were no small number of ladies.

The appearance of the professors brought a round of applause from the great crowd.

A hush followed. Everybody was eagerly awaiting the appearance of the cadets.

Over in the camp there was a certain stir, but everything was being done with order and precision.

Boom!

The heavy report of a cannon startled the throng.

It was a signal, and on the instant the cadet band was heard to strike up a popular march, and the music approached from the direction of the encampment.

"Here they come!"

The cry went up from the great crowd, and the excitement and expectation became intense.

Out from the camp came the foremost subdivision, platoon after platoon of blueclad figures, each line straight as a ruler, marching as if one brain and one impulse governed them all, their uniforms spotless, their equipments and weapons glittering in the sunshine, their youthful faces grave and dignified, their bearing soldierly.

The band was in advance, and on no previous year had the Fardale Cadet Band been as perfect as this year. They played like veterans, and their music was blood-quickening and soul-inspiring.

Along the side of the field they came till a certain point was reached, and then, somewhat back from the front, a strong, manly voice was heard to order:

"Column left!"

In a twinkling the officer in advance whirled about and ordered:

"Left wheel."

Still with the band in its proper position, around swept the perfect line, and platoon after platoon did the same thing at exactly the same point.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

At the instant that the head of the line entered the field the distant batteries down by the cove thundered forth. In some way it had been arranged so that this occurred at precisely the right moment.

Then it was that the magnificent flag was run up to the head of the flagstaff near the bandstand, and the spectators burst into a mighty cheer that was heard far beyond Fardale village.

The professors and the guests were standing. As they passed, the cadets saluted, and the cheering continued. On the three sides of the field where the spectators gathered white billows of fluttering handkerchiefs could be seen.

Never before had such a spectacle been witnessed at Fardale Academy. The day had surely opened most auspiciously.

Among the guests of honor with the professors was one whose bright eyes searched excitedly and eagerly for Frank Merriwell. When he was found, those eyes followed his splendid figure with open admiration, and Inza Burrage regretted that he could not even give her a glance.

When the cadets were all on the field, they formed in

order for inspection, while the band took its place in the stand and played "The Star Spangled Banner."

At this point something occurred that was not on the programme.

Almost with one accord, the great throng of people began singing, and a mighty chorus it was.

> "'Tis the Star-Spangled Banner, oh, long may it wave
> O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave."

Many an eye was dimmed with mist, and hundreds of hearts beat strong with patriotism and love of country.

When this was over, Professor Gunn spoke briefly, and his words aroused further enthusiasm.

Then the professors and their guests were seated, and the inspection began.

Following the inspection was the parade and drill, and this was most successful. The cadets acquitted themselves in a manner that aroused unbounded admiration, and caused not a few to remark that Fardale Academy could not possibly be far behind West Point.

Ten o'clock was the time set for the skirmish drill to come off. It was expected that this would prove exciting and of unusual interest, and it was no disappointment.

Long before this, Frank had succeeded in locating Inza, and he knew her eyes were watching him almost constantly.

In the skirmish drill Frank handled his company with a skill that brought rounds of applause from the witnesses. Some days before he had seen the possibility of making a hit in this drill, as it allowed something besides the ordinary evolutions, and he had practiced and perfected his company in one or two novel movements which could not fail to attract attention.

They did attract attention, and the company was given a hearty cheer, while more than one among the great

throng was heard asking the name of the manly-looking lad in command.

Frank's foes burned with envy.

But for the fact that he must have drawn censure on himself, Reynolds would have bungled in these movements, so that the unity of action would have been broken.

He longed to do so, but he knew what must follow, and he scarcely cared to arouse Lieutenant Gordan, beneath whose eye every movement was taking place.

When the parade was over, the lieutenant called for Merriwell. Frank was soon saluting before him.

"Mr. Merriwell," said the lieutenant, distinctly and clearly, "allow me to congratulate you on the success of your command in the skirmish drill. From what source did you obtain those new movements?"

"To the best of my knowledge, they were my own invention, sir," replied Frank, his voice steady, although his face was flushed.

"Then you have more than ordinary military tact and ability, sir," declared the lieutenant, after which Frank was dismissed and returned to his command.

Rupert Reynolds was boiling, and he felt that no words could express his feelings.

"Look at the cad!" he hissed, beneath his breath. "See him swell like a peacock! But I'll fix him before the day is over!"

Wat Snell, Frank's old enemy, stood shoulder to shoulder with Reynolds, and he plainly heard the words, replying in a whisper:

"Take my advice, and let him alone. Nobody has been able to harm him here, and whoever tries it is sure to be sorry."

"Bah!" almost muttered Rupert. "They have all blundered. I will not be so bungling."

"May you be successful," returned Wat; "but I don't think you stand any show."

Inza was delighted at the honor Frank had won. May Blossom, her particular friend and chum, was at her side, and the two girls clapped their hands with enthusiasm and delight on several occasions. Neither of them missed the lieutenant's words, and, as Frank returned to his position, Inza gave May a hug, as she whispered:

"Isn't he just perfectly splendid!"

"Of course he is," replied May. "Next to Mr. Rains, I think he is the handsomest fellow on the field."

"Next to Mr. Rains!" returned Inza, with great scorn. "Why, Mr. Rains doesn't cut any figure at all with him!"

"That is your opinion, Inza, but you know I think Mr. Rains a splendid fellow. You must remember that he pulled us both out of the water last winter, when we had broken through the ice, and saved us from drowning!"

"I remember it very well, but I also remember that Frank Merriwell plunged into the water and kept us from going under the ice. But for that act, we should have been lost, and Mr. Rains would never have pulled us out."

"I do not deny it, Inza. Mr. Merriwell is a very brave fellow; but you must allow me to admire Mr. Rains the more. You would not like it much if I were to prefer Frank Merriwell, and try to win his favor. You must remember that you thought so once, and——"

"Oh, do hush!" interrupted Inza, her face growing scarlet. "The next thing will be a mock engagement or battle. That will surely be exciting."

"But not nearly so pleasant as a real engagement that is likely to take place some day," said mischievous May.

CHAPTER XVII.

ACCIDENT OR DESIGN?

The mock battle had been planned as the great event of the forenoon.

It was near eleven o'clock when everything was ready for this exhibition.

The engagement began in a spirited manner, and it was not long before the spectators grew breathless with suspense and excitement.

As the engagement grew hotter, Frank Merriwell led a bayonet charge against the enemy.

Just how it happened no one seemed able to tell, but at a certain point he tripped and fell. The line broke over him, and then several persons were seen gathered around him.

"What's happened?" was the question that came from many lips.

"The handsome fellow who was leading the charge is hurt," was the reply sent round. "When he fell, the cadet behind wounded him with his bayonet."

A hurry call was sent to the hospital, and in a very few moments a stretcher was brought, on which Frank Merriwell was carried from the field.

Pale-faced and panting, Inza Burrage had witnessed all this.

"He is hurt!" she gasped, clutching May Blossom's arm till May gave a little cry of pain. "I saw the fellow behind deliberately strike at Frank with his bayonet!"

"It must have been an accident," said May. "How

could any one be vile enough to thus injure him with malicious intent!"

"I don't know how any one could do it, but I know that fellow did. The distance was not so great that I could not see the look on his face, and I am certain he intentionally struck Frank with the bayonet!"

"It is natural for you to think so."

"But I know Frank has a few dangerous enemies in the school. His foes are resolved that he shall not excel in the games and feats this afternoon, and you can't make me believe this was not a dreadful trick to get him out of the way if you talk a thousand years."

"Well, I shall not try to convince you, for I know it is folly to make the attempt when you have once made up your mind."

Inza was restless and distressed. She did not know how severely Frank was wounded, and a horrible fear that he might be maimed for life or hurt so he would die kept wringing at her heart. At length she whispered:

"Come, May, let's slip away while this battle is going on. We can do so without attracting great attention."

"Slip away? What for? Where?"

"Oh, I feel ready to fly! I can't keep still!"

"What do you want to do?"

"Go somewhere—anywhere! Perhaps we may find out how seriously poor Frank is hurt. Come."

She clasped her companion's hand, and May allowed herself to be drawn away. They left their seats, and pressed into the crowd that held hard down to the field.

Inza was a resolute, fearless girl, and she boldly entered the crowd, telling May to keep close behind her.

"Please let me pass, gentlemen," she said, and there was something in her expression and air that caused strong men to clear a path for the girls; so they passed

through the thickly packed throng and finally reached the open space beyond.

Inza knew where the hospital was located, and thither she hurried.

Of course, she was unable to obtain admission, but word was brought her that Mr. Merriwell had been but slightly injured.

In truth, Frank had not been injured very severely, although his escape was most fortunate.

When he fell, Rupert Reynolds had stumbled, and the bayonet on his gun was driven straight toward Frank's legs.

The calf of Frank's left leg was grazed by the weapon, which tore through his trousers.

The fall itself had stunned Merriwell, so that, when he tried to rise, he found himself dizzy and dazed. He made a great effort to get upon his feet, but things were whirling around him, and he was forced to give over the attempt.

However, he had asserted that he could walk from the field, with assistance.

It was thought, however, that the effect would be more striking, and would illustrate the methods of the school in such cases, if he were taken away on a stretcher.

Thus it came about that, although his severest injury came from the fall, the report quickly went round that Merriwell had been bayoneted through the leg, and would take no further part in the exercises of the day.

Reynolds was severely reprimanded for carelessness, and seemed very sorry and contrite.

In his heart the malicious fellow was laughing with exultation.

"I have fixed him!" he thought. "At the very moment when he fell I was longing for something of the kind to occur, and so I was ready to jab at his legs the

moment he went down. Rains will be the champion this afternoon. Merriwell will win no honors to-day!"

The two stretcher bearers had been Bart Hodge and Barney Mulloy, both of whom lingered in the hospital when they saw Frank on a cot, with Dr. Brown examining his injury.

"This is a mere scratch," said the doctor, as he inspected the slight abrasion on Frank's leg. "This will amount to nothing."

"It is not that, doctor," said Frank. "I fell with such force that I was stunned and dazed, and I feel weak and unsteady now."

"You must rest. If you remain quiet for two hours, you should be nearly, if not quite, recovered. Your leg shall be bathed."

"Arrah, dochtor," broke in Barney, anxiously, "will he be able to take a hand in th' ixorcises this afternoon, Oi dunno?"

"He may."

"Don't worry about that," smiled Frank. "I will do my share. I do not propose to be knocked out in this manner."

"It was certainly a deliberate attempt to knock you out," declared Bart.

"How? What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say."

"What makes you think so?"

"I do not think—I know. Rupert Reynolds was behind you."

"Well?"

"It came near being anything but well for you. He saw you fall, and his bayonet tore through your trousers."

"Which must have been an accident."

"Which must have been nothing of the sort. It was

a deliberate and malicious attempt to maim you, and I know it."

"Tut! tut!" cried Doctor Brown, astonished and horrified. "Be careful what you say, young man! You may be called on to prove your words."

"I don't care," said Hodge, doggedly.

"An' it's th' truth he do be spakin', Oi'll bet me hat!" cried the impulsive Barney.

Still Frank looked as if he were not convinced.

"You fellows do not like Reynolds. I cannot think he would do such a thing, even though he may be somewhat favorable to my rival. He might have lamed me for life."

"What do you suppose he cared for that, if he could make it seem an accident!"

"An' th' report is out now that ye're badly hurt, Frankie, me b'y."

"In that case," said Merriwell, "it would be something of a surprise to my enemies if I were to turn up in good form this afternoon."

"Thot it would, Frankie."

Frank was silent a moment, as if thinking of something. His face lighted up, and he said:

"It will be a jolly joke to spring on them. Boys, can't you spread the impression that I am knocked out—can't you do it without actually lying?"

"Have Oi a tongue in me head!" laughed Barney. "Oi should soay we could do thot soame, eh, Hodge?"

"Rather," assured Bart. "But the doctor must remain silent, and no one else be allowed to examine Frank's wound."

Now, the doctor was not such an old man that he could not enter into the spirit of such a deception, and he readily agreed to remain silent in regard to the extent

of Frank's injuries, and not to allow any one else to investigate them.

After the mock battle, the spectators in large numbers sought favorable spots in the vicinity to enjoy picnic luncheons, while many returned to Fardale village.

The cadets, somewhat wearied by the efforts of the forenoon, eagerly discussed what had taken place.

And it was not long before the report was generally circulated that Frank Merriwell had been hurt so severely that he might not be able to leave the hospital for several days.

Merriwell's enemies were filled with unbounded satisfaction. Even Paul Rains felt his heart give a great throb of exultation.

"That settles it!" he thought. "I'll carry off the honors this afternoon."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THROWING THE HAMMER.

At one-thirty o'clock that afternoon the cadet band struck up a lively air from the bandstand, and the contestants in the afternoon sports and exercises came trotting onto the field, to be welcomed by a rousing cheer from the spectators, who were once more packed on three sides of the roped-off arena.

The judges had been selected for everything, and there was to be no needless delay.

Most of the contestants were dressed in tights and wore sweaters. They were indeed a manly looking collection of youths, overflowing with animal spirits and enthusiasm.

Immediately on entering the field, the boys stripped from their sweaters, and set about getting into condition by running, jumping, putting the shot, throwing the hammer, and doing a hundred and one things of the sort.

Inza Burrage and May Blossom were once more in the position which they had occupied during the forenoon.

In vain Inza looked about for Frank.

"Where is he?" she murmured, in disappointment and alarm. "They said he was not badly hurt. He ought to be here somewhere."

"Perhaps he was hurt just bad enough to prevent him from taking any part this afternoon."

"In that case he is severely injured, for, under the cir-

cumstances, nothing else could keep him from taking part."

"There is Mr. Rains."

"Bother Mr. Rains!"

"Why, Inza! You expect me to be sympathetic toward Frank Merriwell, but you are not even respectful toward Paul Rains."

"Oh, I beg forgiveness, May! but you must know how distressed I am. Why didn't they tell us the truth at the hospital? Frank must be badly hurt, or they would not have deceived us. Don't you think that is the way of it?"

No answer. May was following Rains' movements with her eyes, and she did not hear the question.

May Blossom was not the only one who was watching Paul's every move. The eyes of his friends were on him. More than that, the best judges among the spectators had singled him out, and were commenting on his handsome build and graceful carriage. He had been selected as a fellow worth watching.

In a very few moments the first contest was announced, and the names of those who had entered for it given.

It was to be a trial at throwing the hammer, and the contestants were Paul Rains, Hans Dunnerwust, Barney Mulloy, Ephraim Gallup and Frank Merriwell.

The last name created a stir.

Frank Merriwell, where was he?

"I should have thought they would have withdrawn his name," observed Rupert Reynolds. "They must have known he was in no condition to take part."

"Is it a sure thing he is not in condition?" asked Hugh Bascomb, who was with Reynolds.

"Why, of course—it is dead sure."

"Well, I'll not feel that it is sure till he fails to show up on the field."

"He has already failed."

"Wait. The first contestant is Dunnerwust. I wonder what he thinks he can do throwing the hammer?"

The roly-poly, jolly-looking Dutch boy advanced, and spat on his hands before picking up the big sixteen-pound hammer.

"I pet you your life I preaks der recort," he observed, and his appearance caused the spectators to break into laughter. "Vell, you may laugh at dot uf you don'd vant to," he cried, "but maype you don'd laugh on der oder side uf your mouts pime-py. Ged avay oudt! Sdand from under!"

He squared off, with a look on his face that seemed to say he was going to throw the hammer clean across the field.

Over and over he swung the hammer—once, twice, three times.

But it did not complete the third swing.

In some way the hammer slipped out of his hands, and went sailing through the air in the wrong direction!

"Look oudt!" squawked Hans, as he stared up into the air for the hammer, not knowing whither it had gone. "Uf dot comes down your headt on, I vill ged hurt!"

A great shout of laughter went up from the spectators, for the Dutch lad presented a most ludicrous spectacle.

"Look here, b'jee!" muttered Ephraim Gallup, who had been standing behind Hans, but a little to one side, which was fortunate, as the hammer would have struck him if he had been directly in line; "if you've got a grutch ag'in me, say so."

"Oxcuse me!" supplicated the Dutch boy. "Dot vos a misdake."

"Wal, it come nigh bein' a serious one fer me, b'gum!"

The hammer was returned to Hans, and he prepared to make another effort.

"Shust eferypody stant avay off," was his advice.

This piece of advice was accepted. He was left alone.

This time the Dutch boy rubbed dirt on his hands, and got a firm grip on the handle of the hammer.

"Now you shust see der oldt thing go!" he cried.

He made the swings successfully, but sent the hammer up into the air on a curve, so it struck the ground not very far away.

The judges gravely made the measurement, and the record went up on a big blackboard—twenty-three feet and seven inches!

"Vell, I don'd pelief I vill lower der recort righd avay," grinned the Dutch lad. "Vait a vile till I ged me at someding else. I don'd care apout dot hammer-drowing peesness."

Barney Mulloy was next on the list, and the Irish lad came forward.

"Oi'll beat th' Dutchman, av Oi don't do anything else," he observed.

Barney was a muscular-looking fellow, and he looked as if he were able to do something astonishing with the hammer. The spectators who had been laughing at the exhibition made by Hans now became silent, and watched Barney.

With the very first swing he made, a good judge in the crowd remarked:

"He is strong enough, but he is too thick about the shoulders to make a big throw. At lifting he will be all right, but he is slightly shoulder-bound."

In truth, Barney could not get the free, sweeping swing that is necessary in order to make a long cast with the hammer. The swing gave his body a jerky motion, which broke the steady sweep.

With all his strength, he cast the hammer, and he made

a fairly good throw, for the distance was eighty-three feet.

Ephraim Gallup was next on the list, and he came forward with a queer grin on his thin, homely face.

"Gol darned if I don't feel zif I could fling this thing clean over dad's old barn!" he muttered, as he picked up the hammer. "Somebody's got to hustle if they beat me this day, an' don't ye fergit it."

He rubbed his hands in the dirt, and then secured a firm grip on the handle of the hammer.

"Look avay oudt where you throw dot," warned Hans, as Ephraim cast a queer look over his shoulder at the Dutchman.

Then Hans quickly placed himself behind Mulloy, which caused another burst of laughter.

Ephraim had long arms, and he swung the hammer easily and gracefully, making a long and beautiful throw —a throw that caused the spectators to clap their hands.

"That's purty good, b'gosh!" muttered the country lad, his face flushed.

Paul Rains looked anxious, for, to his great surprise, he saw that Gallup had made a remarkable throw.

Was this countryman to become a dangerous rival, now that Merriwell was out of the way?

It looked like that.

Paul watched the board to see the result given by the tape, and he caught his breath when it appeared.

The boy from Vermont had made a throw of one hundred and nineteen feet and nine inches!

"By Jove! that is wonderful!" burst from the lips of Bart Hodge. "Why, Hickok, of Yale, made but one hundred and twenty-three and nine. Gallup is not far behind him, and he has never had a hundredth part of the training. I doubt if that mark is beaten."

"Oh, you doubt it, do you!" fiercely thought Paul

Rains. "You are one of Merriwell's particular friends, and you don't want to see me make a showing here to-day. Well, I'll beat that throw if it is in me to do such a thing."

He came out of his sweater in a twinkling, and advanced to receive the hammer.

Then Rains' friends sent up a burst of applause, which followed close after the applause the spectators had given Gallup.

Determination was written on Paul's face. He made two short throws to get the swing and limber his shoulders for the supreme effort, and then he grasped the hammer firmly, and put himself in position for the cast.

A hush settled over the field. Every one seemed to know that Rains was going to make a mighty effort to beat the countryman. The band played a soft, lively air, that was of the right sort to nerve one to his best.

Over and over swung the hammer, and then it went hurtling through the air, hurled with every ounce of strength at Rains' command.

The moment the hammer struck the ground, it was seen that Paul had tied or beaten Ephraim.

Then there was an expectant hush till the board should announce the result.

Paul walked back and got into his sweater, feeling that he had done his best, and believing he had beaten Gallup.

He was right. In a few moments the following score was chalked against his name:

"One hundred and twenty feet, one inch."

Rains had beaten Gallup by four inches; and the applause he received made his heart leap with exultation.

But his exultation swiftly turned to astonishment and dismay, for, in response to his name, Frank strode out from the crowd, and walked swiftly toward the scratch.

Then the cadets sent up a shout that told how popular Merriwell really was, and the band burst into a lively air that set hundred of hearts throbbing tumultuously.

As if actuated by a single impulse, the boys gave a variation of the academy yell:

"Ha! ha! ha! Rah! rah! rah! Merriwell! Merriwell! Rigger-boom! Zigger-boom! Zz-zz-zz-zz!"

CHAPTER XIX.

JUMPING.

The final mighty buzzing hiss sounded like the noise made by a rocket in its flight.

Paul Rains actually staggered.

"Merriwell!"

He turned pale, and his hands were clinched till the fingernails pressed into the palms.

To his unutterable amazement, Frank did not even limp in the least. He never looked better in all his life than he did at that moment when receiving the ovation from his comrades and classmates. He bowed and smiled, his face flushed, and his pulse throbbed heavily and swiftly.

Inza Burrage could not repress her unbounded delight. As the academy yell burst from the throats of Frank's admirers, she sprang to her feet and waved her handkerchief till pulled back to the seat by May, who swiftly said in her ear:

"Don't, Inza! You are attracting everybody's attention!"

"I don't care for that!" was the excited reply. "There he is—see him? There's Frank! And did you hear the fellows yell when he appeared! That tells what they think of Frank Merriwell here at Fardale Academy!"

"Of course he is popular," said May, "but he will have to do something wonderful if he beats Paul at throwing the hammer."

"Pshaw!" returned the dark-eyed girl. "He can beat Paul Rains without half trying!"

"We'll see about that," said May, rather sharply, feeling not a little touched.

"That's right, we will," came from the lips of the other girl, as if it were already settled.

Frank peeled out of his sweater, which he tossed to Barney, who anxiously hastened to his side, asking:

"How do yez fale, Frankie, me b'y?"

"Never felt better in my life," was the quiet and confident reply.

"Do yez think ye can bate Rains?"

"I am going to try it, but I shall not be able to beat him a great deal, if at all. That fellow has made an astonishing throw, and he deserves congratulations."

"Desarves nothing!" snorted the Irish lad. "It's th' big head he do be afther gettin'. Av ye don't bate him, Oi'll fale loike committin' suicoide, so Oi will!"

Frank was ready to do his best. He picked up the hammer, balanced it to suit his fancy, gave it two wide, swift swings, and threw it before such an act was expected.

For all that he had seemed to do all this so easily, Merriwell had put his entire strength and skill into the effort, and he felt that he could not better it if he were to try twenty times.

Once more there was a hush, for it was seen that Rains and Merriwell were nearly tied.

Paul held his breath while the tape was being run, and it was with a great effort that he held back a bitter curse as he saw the figures which were soon displayed on the board in connection with his rival's name. They were:

"One hundred and twenty feet, three inches."

Rains had beaten Gallup four inches, and Merriwell had beaten Rains two. It was not a large margin in either case, but it was death to Paul's hope of being the winner in the first contest.

In a moment a surge of rage and hatred filled the heart of the ambitious youth. He actually longed to fly at Frank's throat, but, with all his self-command, he put this desire aside, and actually smiled.

Reynolds came forward and expressed his feelings in a few words spoken for Paul's ear alone, to which Rains laughingly replied:

"Only two inches, and I don't mind that, but, had I known he was to follow me, I should have put a foot more of muscle into my throw. I am beaten by a trick."

Now, this was not true, and Paul knew it, but the rancor in his heart brought the words from his lips. He had thrown the hammer with every pound and every ounce of strength at his command, and he could not have cast it farther if he had known beyond a doubt that Frank was to follow him.

Frank heard Paul's words, but he did not show by a look or a sign that they reached his ears. He also heard Reynolds say:

"Well, you know what to expect now, and you can surely beat him in the next contest, which is jumping."

"Well, there will be more than two inches difference between us," said Paul, in a tone and manner that made Frank's blood leap hotly in his veins.

No one could have imagined Merriwell was aroused and angered not a little at that moment, for he stood chatting and laughing with his friends, having resumed his sweater.

Frank's admirers and the crowd in general had greeted the last score with a cheer of delight, and he was now regarded as something of a wonder by almost everybody.

Inza Burrage was delighted beyond measure. She gave May a big hug, laughing:

"What did I tell you, dear! I knew he could do it!"

"But he did not beat Mr. Rains very much—only two inches. That is scarcely worth mentioning."

May's lip quivered a little, and, seeing this, Inza swiftly said:

"Of course it isn't much, dear. They are very nearly matched. It is possible that Frank did not beat him at all, for the men who took the measurements may have made a mistake."

"It's good of you to say that!" cried May. "I shall not care so much if Mr. Merriwell does beat Paul, now that I know you feel so generous about it."

The best of feeling was immediately restored between the two girls, and it was not marred during the rest of the day, as Inza took care to praise almost everything Paul did.

Though there were many more trials, no better record was made, and the moment the hammer-throwing contest was over, preparations for the jumping-match were made. In less than a quarter of a minute after the last score was shown on the board the marks were swept away, and the names of the contestants in the jumping match went up. They were Harvey Dare, Hans Dunnerwust, Frank Merriwell, and Paul Rains.

It had been decided to drop the standing jump, which could be of very little interest for the spectators. First came the running broad jump, and Harvey Dare advanced promptly to the scratch.

Dare was a slender, racy fellow, and he looked as if he would be able to fly over a long stretch of ground.

The spectators held their breath as he suddenly leaned forward and dashed toward the scratch.

Dare made a beautiful leap, but good judges saw in a moment that there was nothing record-breaking about it.

The board soon announced it as being nineteen feet eleven inches.

This was good, but the record at Fardale was twenty-one feet and one inch, so the applause was not great.

Hans Dunnerwust had two of the boys drag him out of his sweater, and then, grinning till his face looked like a full moon, he waddled toward the starting point.

The crowd outside the field set up a shout of laughter.

"Now you'll see all records smashed," shouted some one. "The Dutchman can bounce himself twenty-five feet, like a rubber ball."

"He's got wings," yelled another voice. "I can see 'em under his shoulderblades."

"Say, mein frient," called Hans, as he paused at the starting point, "uf you open your mout' so vide as dot, you catch coldt mit your chillplains in."

This was said in a way that caused the crowd to roar again, and Hans was given a round of applause.

He proceeded to gather himself together, spat on his hands, rubbed them in the dirt, flung his cap aside, and then started for the scratch.

"He's off!" bellowed a loud voice.

Hans stopped short with remarkable suddenness, and shook his fist in the direction whence the words had come.

"Uf you don'd say dot again, I pet me your life you vill ged hurt!" he cried, angrily. "I don'd vos off, und can't you vorget id! peen sassed enough alretty yet righd avay soon! peen a vighter, und you vos in danger uf my life uf you sass me some more!"

Having thus delivered himself, he walked back to the starting point with dignity three inches thick all over his person.

The crowd literally howled with delight, and the band played "Ta-ra-rum."

Having recovered himself, Hans started off again, and he ran for the scratch with all his might, seeming de-

termined to make a leap that would amaze everybody. But when the mark was reached, he stopped like a stone, looked at the place where Dare had landed, shook his head, and observed:

"I don'd feel like shumping shust now. Dot vos too easy to peat."

Then he walked away and began getting into his sweater, as if thoroughly satisfied with what he had done.

Frank was next, and the throng received him warmly.

As Rains was to follow, Frank did not know the distance he would have to cover in order to be the victor.

He was determined to set Rains a stint that would come near "breaking his heart" before he had begun. Rains' insinuation that he had been beaten by a trick in throwing the hammer rankled in Frank's breast.

Every eye was on the athletic youth, who wore dark-blue trunks, and whose figure was seen to be finely molded, closely knit, compact, yet supple.

Frank balanced himself for the start, and then dashed at the scratch, gaining headway with every stride.

He did not leap high into the air, but he seemed to sail over the ground in a most remarkable and amazing way, bringing a gasp of delighted surprise from those who knew him best and were most confident in his ability.

It was with no little difficulty that Rains repressed an exclamation of dismay. He saw Frank had done something wonderful, but he was not prepared for the record that went up on the board.

Merriwell had covered twenty-two feet, eleven and one-fourth inches!

That was better than Paul had been able to do at his best in private trials, and it was one-fourth of an inch more than an entire foot above any previous record made at Fardale.

No wonder Frank's friends crowded about him and shook his hand.

"By Jove, old man!" cried Hodge, in the greatest delight, "you have astonished your friends to-day. None of us believed you able to do anything like this. That is exactly the record made in the inter-collegiate contests two years ago, and it has not been broken in any inter-collegiate tournament since."

The excitement over the making of a new record at Fardale was intense.

Rains' particular friends looked blue. Some began to desert and crowd around Merriwell, and these were loudest in their congratulations and assertions that they had known all the time that he would do it. Frank knew every one of them, and the smile on his lips gave them a cynical curl at the corners.

In his heart Rains felt that he was defeated, but he resolved to do his level best, hoping against hope that, by some remarkable chance, he might out-do himself and defeat Merriwell.

This hope was vain.

He fell nine inches behind Merriwell, and, although he had beaten the old record at Fardale, he was thoroughly disgusted, and not a little disheartened.

CHAPTER XX.

READY FOR THE DASH.

The running high jump followed, and the contestants came up in the same order as for the broad jump.

In this each contestant was given three trials.

"It is useless to buck against Merriwell," smiled Harvey Dare. "He is bound to carry off the record in this kind of work."

"Oh, I don't know about that," said Frank. "There is a vast difference between the broad jump and the high jump, and the fellow who is good at one may not stand any show at the other."

"That's all right, old man, but it happens that I have seen you go into the air, and you have springs in your feet."

But Harvey had pride, and he was determined to do his best, being entered for the affair. He lost no time in display, but made three leaps in astonishingly swift succession, and his showing of five feet eight and one-half inches was certainly good.

Once more Hans Dunnerwust was dragged from his sweater, and again he aroused the merriment of the spectators by his manner as he prepared to leap.

"Put her up shust two veet to start mit," he directed. "I don'd vos goin' to hurt meinseluf der peginnin' from, you pet!"

So the pole was pegged at two feet, and he bore down on it like a hurricane. He hurled himself into the air with all his strength, succeeded in getting his feet over,

but came down squarely across the pole, and broke it in two.

Hans struck the ground with a thump that brought a grunt from his lips. He landed in a sitting posture, and he did not offer to arise till the assistants helped him to his feet. Then he walked gravely round the uprights, and looked at the ground with the solemnity of an old owl.

"Dot groundt vos nod in coot gondition," he declared. "It vos too slibbery. Oxcuse me uf I don'd shump some more."

Then, amid the laughter and cries of the crowd, he walked over and began getting into his sweater.

A new pole was supplied, and Frank prepared to jump. To start with, he had it placed at five feet six, which he cleared with what seemed to be scarcely an effort.

Then he had it raised to five feet ten, and this was cleared. His third and last venture was at six feet and one inch, five feet and eleven being the record at Fardale.

Frank gathered himself for his best effort, and made the run.

Just as he reached the last point of the run he made a false step, and that threw him out slightly.

Up into the air he went, but he did not clear the pole. His heel touched, although it did not dislodge it, and his score was given at five feet and ten.

Frank's friends were filled with dismay at his misfortune, but he simply smiled.

"A fellow can't expect to have luck with him all the time," he said, philosophically.

Hope came into Paul Rains' face, and he was quickly prepared to take his turn.

"Rains will show what he is good for this time," declared Rupert Reynolds. "If Merriwell fancied he is go-

ing to have a walk-over here to-day, he will find himself mistaken."

Paul first had the pole placed at five feet ten, and this he cleared in dashing style, which brought a generous round of applause.

Then Rains boldly told the judges to place the pole at six feet and one inch, which was the third and hardest essay made by Merriwell.

Frank had failed, and Paul resolved to have more than one try at it, if he did not succeed the first time.

When everything was ready, he gathered himself for the mighty effort, and dashed like a crimson meteor at the pole.

It was a beautiful jump, and he cleared the pole fairly and gracefully.

This time it was Rains who received the applause. He declined to make another effort, being well satisfied with what he had done.

As Merriwell had established a record for Fardale in the running broad jump, so had he established one in the running high jump.

Now his friends were eager to congratulate him. They crowded around him, and shook his hand.

When this was over, Frank walked straight up to Rains, held out his hand, and said:

"That was a beautiful jump, old man, and I congratulate you most heartily."

There was something so genuine and so generous in this that Paul instantly accepted the proffered hand, returning:

"Thank you, Merriwell. That is my highest notch, and I think you would have made it, if you had been fortunate."

"Possibly I might," admitted Frank, but he said nothing about the false step he had made.

May Blossom had been more than delighted by Paul's success.

"There, there!" she cried, pinching Inza's arm, "that shows you what Paul Rains can do! He has beaten Frank Merriwell fairly and squarely! What have you to say now?"

"Oh, it was an accident!" declared Inza, in confusion. "He never could have done it otherwise."

"Now, I don't think that's fair," protested May. "I didn't say it was an accident when Paul was beaten."

"But it really was an accident in this case," persisted the dark-eyed girl, biting her lips. "You must have seen it plainly enough."

But May would not acknowledge that she had seen anything of the sort, and it is not at all probable that she did detect Frank's misstep, which Inza's sharp eyes had noted.

In neither of the next two contests, which were putting the shot and pole-vaulting, did Merriwell and Rains take part.

Putting the shot was somewhat different from throwing the hammer, and Barney Mulloy was once more a contestant.

In this case the Irish lad's remarkable development of muscles about his chest and shoulders stood him in good stead, and, although he did not make a record for Fardale, he defeated Hugh Bascomb, who made a put of thirty-two feet and two inches.

Mulloy's put was thirty-two feet five and a half.

Pole-vaulting was essayed by six contestants, among whom were Reynolds and Hodge. Bart's sole desire was to beat Reynolds, but, in doing so, he exerted himself to his utmost, and, to his surprise, came off victor in the contest, having covered ten feet and one inch, which

was three inches better than Reynolds, who was tied by two others.

The dash of one hundred yards was next in order. For this both Merriwell and Rains were entered, as well as Reynolds, Hodge, and Dare.

By the time the last contest was finished arrangements for the dash were being perfected, and it was not long before the contestants were directed to get into line at the mark.

In this dash there would be something far more exciting for the spectators than in anything that had come before, and favorites were chosen when the boys lined up.

By chance Frank and Paul were placed side by side, and they were the universal favorites. It was seen that they were much alike in build. If anything, the lad who wore the crimson trunks attracted the greater attention, and was more generally selected for a winner.

Hodge was a rangey lad, and his dark face seemed full of determination. Many times had Frank told him that he might excel in athletics if he would abandon cigarettes, and Bart had finally given them up, but the time since doing so had not been sufficient for him to recover from their bad effects and get into good trim. Still, he resolved to see what he could do in both the one hundred-yard dash and the two hundred and twenty-yard run, hardly expecting to do much at either.

The spectators must have seen the notice that betting was strictly prohibited, but such a notification could not prevent wagers being made, and considerable money was posted on the result of the dash.

Reynolds had seemed anxious to get close to Merriwell on the line, and had succeeded in obtaining a position to suit himself. Frank gave the fellow no attention, although he could not help wondering why Rupert

had entered, as he stood scarcely a ghost of a show of taking one of the first three positions.

"Ready!" rang out the clear voice of the starter.

With both hands clinched and one outstretched, the contestants leaned forward over the line.

"One!" counted the starter.

The band played softly and quickly, while the spectators held their breath.

"Two!"

Yet a bit further did some of the contestants lean over the line, anxiety and determination written on their faces.

"Three——"

Bang!

The pistol in the starter's hand spoke, and away leaped the line of supple, muscular figures, while the band burst forth in a wav that seemed to fairly lift them over the ground.

CHAPTER XXI.

DEFEATED BY A TRICK.

"They're off!"

"Hurrah!"

As if with a single impulse, the line of figures sprang away, but, within the first twenty yards, Paul Rains forged to the front, running like a fawn.

To the surprise of many, Rupert Reynolds took second place, while Frank Merriwell was third, with Hodge close behind him.

Rains' friends were delighted. Merriwell had a reputation as a sprinter, but it seemed that he was out of condition, and not a few fancied he had been injured enough in the mock battle to prevent him from doing his best in the dash.

Reynolds was straining every nerve to keep his place, but he was watching from the corners of his eyes for Merriwell to forge alongside at any moment. Knowing Merriwell's ability as a runner, Rupert had not entered the race with the hope of winning. He had quite another object in view.

In his hand Rupert held concealed an object that might have much to do with the result of the race.

Dare, of whom something had been expected by his friends, proved a disappointment from the start. He was clearly outclassed, and at no time was he in the race.

The excitement was great as the lithe-limbed youths sped over the ground.

Hodge forged ahead, and reached the side of Merriwell, and it was thought that he would pass.

Nothing of the kind happened.

Fifty yards had been covered when Frank was seen to gather himself and literally fly over the ground, quickly making a gap between himself and Hodge.

A gasp of relief came from Merriwell's friends, for it was seen that he had not put himself at his very best to start with.

In a moment he was at Rupert Reynolds' side. In another moment he would have passed and pressed hard upon Rains.

Then—— Just what happened and how it happened nobody seemed able to tell. All at once, Merriwell gave a cry, clasped his hands to his eyes and nose, and went down in a heap, rolling over and over.

With a flying leap, Hodge cleared his fallen friend, and he succeeded in passing Reynolds without trouble.

But Rains came in first, although Bart was not more than a yard and a half behind when Paul broke the tape.

Reynolds was third, and Dare was seen bending over Frank Merriwell, who was sitting on the ground, with his hands clasped over his nose and eyes.

Rains' time went up at ten and one-half seconds, which was excellent, although many college amateurs have done the distance in ten seconds.

"What's the matter with Merriwell?" was the cry that was heard on all sides.

"He fell!"

"He's hurt!"

"Something has happened to his eyes!"

Harvey Dare had asked:

"What's the matter, old man? Are you hurt?"

In reply, Frank gasped:

"It—it's my eyes!"

"What's the matter with them?"

"I don't know. Something struck them—something that stung and took away my sight and breath."

"Don't you know what it was? Why, I can smell—hartshorn!"

"That's it!"

"But how in the world——"

"That's what I can't tell. Of a sudden a fine spray seemed to strike in my eyes, and it knocked me down as if I had been hit by a hammer."

"There's foul play here!" said Dare.

From every side the boys came running in, and surrounded Frank, eagerly asking what had happened.

Harvey Dare was on the point of telling what he knew when Merriwell silenced him, saying swiftly:

"Mum's the word. Don't peach. Let me explain."

Then he told them he had been seized with dizziness, which had caused him to fall, an explanation which was satisfactory to the most of them.

There were those, however, who saw Merriwell had not spoken the whole truth, and they were curious to know just what had taken place. Among them were Hodge and Mulloy.

Between these two friends, Frank walked from the spot where he had fallen.

"You were going to the front when you went down," said Bart. "In two more seconds you would have been even with Rains."

"Thot's roight," nodded Barney. "Ye put on stame just whin it wur naded. Pwhat made yez fall, Oi dunno?"

"Do you remember my fight with Bascomb some time ago?" asked Frank.

"Av course we do."

"You know red pepper was flung into my eyes?"

"Yis, an' a dirthy thrick it wur, begobs!"

"You do not mean to say you had pepper flung in your eyes just now, do you?" asked Bart, fiercely.

"No."

"Then what——"

"Wait, and keep still. If anybody asks you, say I fell from dizziness. That's all."

It was enough to make both lads curious and excited, but Frank would say no more, and he again cautioned them to be sure and answer questions as he had directed.

"It's me proivate opinion, Frankie, me b'y," observed Barney, "that there's a job afoot to bate yez by crooked manes t'-day, av ye can't be bate inny other way."

"In which case my enemies will simply put me on my mettle, and I will show them what kind of stuff I am made of," said Frank, as he held a handkerchief to his eyes to stanch and conceal the flow of tears caused by the hartshorn spray which had struck him. "I am in the hurdle race, and dizziness will not stop me."

Frank was thoroughly angry, but he was careful to make no assertions he could not prove. It seemed strange to him that Reynolds had been able to throw the hartshorn spray in his eyes without being detected. If a fellow was skillful enough to do such a thing in the open light of day, he felt sure it would be no easy thing to prove him guilty.

There was quite a different set of contestants in the two hundred and twenty-yard run, which followed the dash. Neither Merriwell nor Rains had entered this contest.

Supreme in his confidence in his own abilities, Rains had selected to compete in such contests as Merriwell chose. His confidence had received a rude shock at first, but he was now recovering swiftly.

Frank wondered if Paul knew anything of the harts-

horn trick. He would have given much to have been satisfied in his own mind on that point.

He did not wish to think Rains guilty of knowing anything about such a perfidious piece of business, but Rains had profited by it, which made his case look somewhat suspicious.

Paul sought Frank out, and found him bathing his face and eyes in a bucket of water which somebody had brought.

"It was a most unfortunate accident, Merriwell," said Rains, with the least bit of a condescending air. "How did it happen?"

"Can't you tell me?" asked Frank, significantly.

Rains fell back a bit, knitting his brows.

"Tell you!" he echoed. "Of course not! I did not see you at the time."

"There are plenty who did see me, and yet nobody seems to know just what happened."

"Nobody but yourself."

"Well," said Frank, slowly, wiping his face with a towel and looking over it at Paul, "there may be others."

"Did you stumble?" asked Rains, with apparent innocence.

"I fell, but I did not stumble. I was knocked down."

"What's that? You don't mean to say you were fouled?"

"Oh, yes I do! That is exactly what I mean to say."

There was a murmur of excited astonishment from the crowd that had gathered around the rivals.

Frank had not meant to say so much, but, having stepped out upon such ground, he was not the fellow to retreat.

Rains' face grew pale, and he scowled angrily.

"Then how happens it that no one saw the foul com-

mitted?" he demanded, sharply. "The judges gave me the race, and I won it fairly and squarely."

"There may have been a foul committed which was not seen by the judges."

"Explain your meaning, sir!"

"I am not going to explain at present, but this affair shall be investigated, and I may make charges, as well as an explanation, later on. That's all."

Quivering, pale, and angry, Rains cried:

"I fail to understand how there could have been a foul that no one saw. It looks to me as if you took your defeat with bad grace, and were endeavoring to find some way of belittling my victory. But I will tell you something I have heard, and it may not make you feel any better. I heard one of the spectators declare that you saw you were beaten, and so you fell down of your own accord."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE HURDLE RACE.

If Paul Rains had not lost his head with anger, he would not have given utterance to those words. He regretted them the moment they left his lips, but it was then too late to recall them.

Frank's face flushed, and then paled; but he commanded his passions, and he held himself in check. When he spoke his voice was cold and calm.

"I have no doubt but you heard somebody say that, Rains, and, as it is not true, you should understand that it does not add pleasure or satisfaction to my feelings. I do not claim that I could have beaten you, but I do claim that I was put out of the race by——"

Frank checked himself, but was about to continue, when Rains burst forth:

"The only way to settle this matter satisfactorily is for you and me to run the race over again, and I challenge you to do so at the conclusion of the regular program."

"I accept the challenge," said Frank, quietly.

This caused no little stir and excitement, and the report that Rains and Merriwell would contest in a one hundred-yard dash at the conclusion of the regular exercises spread with great rapidity.

Rains now had plenty of supporters, and it was asserted by them that he would defeat Merriwell by half-a-second at least.

Frank's friends smiled, and there were very few of them who had lost a particle of confidence in him.

Merriwell and Rains were the two figures to attract interest on the field. The rivalry between them had become known to the great crowd of spectators, and each lad had won admirers and would-be backers.

If Merriwell won the dash, Rains would have fallen into the background; but the result was quite enough to make Paul prominent as a formidable rival of the lad who had been most popular in the academy.

As for Rupert Reynolds, he shook in his shoes, fearing Merriwell would denounce him. He had not stopped to count the cost of exposure, and now that his contemptible trick had resulted in Frank's defeat he was terror-stricken.

Rupert fancied that somebody must have seen him elevate one hand and throw the hartshorn spray into Merriwell's eyes as Frank was passing, and proof of such an act would mean disgrace and dismissal for him.

As soon as possible, while the other contestants were being rubbed down in their tents, he slipped away and got rid of the tiny squirt-gun with which he had thrown the spray into Frank's eyes. He did not mean to have it found on his person in case Merriwell should denounce him and he were searched.

Being treacherous and tricky, Rupert was a genuine coward. He had little foresight in discerning the possible result of any mean action, but when the act was performed he was invariably filled with terror at the thoughts of the probable outcome.

Paul Rains did not approve of any tricky schemes proposed to him by Reynolds. In his heart, Paul held Rupert in genuine contempt, but, being ambitious to defeat Merriwell, and finding that Reynolds could purchase favors with his money, he tolerated the fellow.

Now it happened that Hugh Bascomb had seen Rey-

nolds' trick, but, being an enemy of Merriwell's, Bascomb was not liable to tell what he knew.

However, the former bully of the academy followed Rupert stealthily, and saw him get rid of the tiny squirt-gun.

When Rupert returned to the field, Bascomb lost no time in securing the squirt-gun.

"Ha, ha!" he laughed, maliciously. "This is worth something to me. Reynolds has plenty of money, and I'll milk him of a few dollars."

By the time Rupert returned to the field, arrangements for the two hundred and twenty-yard run had been completed, and the four contestants were soon sent away by the starter.

The excitement of this race soon made the crowd forget the queer happening of the one hundred yard dash.

For one hundred yards a cadet named Bristol led, with Dodge second, and Dare third. Then Dare astounded himself and everybody else by making a spurt and passing both Hodge and Bristol, holding the lead for a second, perhaps.

Bristol seemed to lose heart, and Hodge darted past, overtook Dare, and forged to the front, a position which he held to the finish.

Dare broke himself by his spurt, for he fell back rapidly after being passed by Hodge, and Bristol was soon second again, a position which he could not hold, however, as St. Elmo, the fourth man, pressed to his side and took second place before the finish.

Hodge's time was twenty-five seconds.

Panting and triumphant, Bart approached Frank, who gave him his hand.

"You never could have done that had you stuck to cigarettes, old man," said Frank.

"That's right," agreed Bart. "My wind astonishes myself."

The four hundred and forty yard run followed, but neither Merriwell nor Rains took part in it.

They were holding themselves in reserve for the hurdle race of one hundred and twenty yards.

The winner of the four hundred and forty-yard run was St. Elmo, who seemed to have gotten into condition by the preceding race. He made the distance in fifty-five and one-half.

Then came the hurdle race.

The hurdles had been erected. Ten of them had been placed at varying distances of not less than twelve nor more than twenty feet apart, the first one being fifteen yards from the scratch mark.

Five contestants had entered for this race. They were Reynolds, Dare, Bristol, Rains and Merriwell.

By this time, finding Frank had not denounced him, Rupert was beginning to breathe easier.

As Frank came up to the scratch, he gave Reynolds a look that made the fellow quail. That look plainly said there would be serious trouble if any monkey-business was tried in this race.

Rains had begun to believe that he would be able to defeat Merriwell in the hurdle race. He did not expect a "snap," but he was willing to do his level best if he could win by a foot.

On the other hand, Frank was now thoroughly aroused, and he felt able to set a hot pace for anybody who might try to crowd him.

The afternoon was well advanced, and the starter lost no time in "sending" the contestants.

At the crack of the pistol, the five lads darted like tigers at the first hurdle.

Rains took the lead in two springs, and he was first to rise to the hurdle, clearing it with at least a foot to spare.

"He jumps too high," said Hodge, who was watching the race with his heart seeming to throb in his throat. "Merriwell clears it by scarcely two inches. He does not expend so much force as Rains."

"But Rains has th' lade, worse luck!" exclaimed Barney Mulloy.

"Don'd you mindt," put in Hans Dunnerwust, with confidence. "Dot poy Vrankie don'd peen peat alretty yet."

Reynolds did not seem to have any heart for the race, as he fell to the rear at once, and he was not seen to make any severe effort to better his position throughout the race.

Bristol seemed in good form for the hurdles, as he secured second position, which he held for four hurdles.

But his judgment was not good in measuring the distance between the hurdles, and he made a miscalculation on the fifth. The break caused him to jump poorly, and his foot struck the bar, throwing him heavily to the ground.

The fall put him out of the race.

Frank went over the bar like a leaping fawn, and, to the intense astonishment of everybody, he seemed to clear the distance that lay between him and the next hurdle with the speed of a whirlwind. He was scarcely behind Rains when the sixth bar was passed.

Rains realized that Merriwell was right upon him, and threatening to take the lead. He put all his energy into the attempt to hold his position.

Vain effort!

A cheer went up as Merriwell was seen to pass Rains and clear the seventh hurdle slightly in advance.

"Begobs! Oi knew th' b'y'd do it!" shouted Barney Mulloy, in the greatest delight.

"Vot I told you, ain'd id!" roared Hans, reaching up to thump Barney in the small of the back with his clinched fist. "Don'd I know dot all der time? Vell, uf I don'd, you vos a liar!"

And now everybody gasped with amazement, for they saw Merriwell draw away from Rains with such speed that Rains seem to be "standing still," as one enthusiastic friend of Frank remarked. The distance widened between the two boys with great rapidity, so that the hearts of Paul's friends were heavy with disappointment.

"Oh, confound the luck!" grated Wat Snell, who had been hoping against hope that Merriwell would be beaten and lose his prestige. "That fellow can't be defeated, and it is useless for anybody to try to do it! I have had my fill of it."

Snell had, indeed, found it was not a profitable thing to scheme and work against Merriwell, for his crooked tricks had brought such disgrace upon himself that he was shunned and scorned by the cadets, having scarcely a friend left in the academy.

Having taken the lead, Frank held it to the end, beating Rains by ten yards.

Indeed, Dare came near passing Rains, who seemed to have slackened when he saw there was no hope of coming in first.

The race was over, Frank was the winner, and again the cry went up:

"Ha! ha! ha! Rah! rah! rah! Merriwell! Merriwell! Rigger-boom! Zigger-boom! Zz-zz-zz-zz!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE LAST MATCH.

Rains was not a little disappointed and disheartened by the result of the hurdle race.

Reynolds was thoroughly disgusted.

Now the fickle crowd was ready to accept Frank Merriwell as the superior all-round athlete.

The remaining games and contests lasted less than half-an-hour, at the end of which time it was announced that the exhibitions of the day would close by a special one-hundred-yard dash between Merriwell and Rains.

This announcement was received with great applause, and people who had been departing turned back to witness this final event.

For all that the lads had participated in so many races and sports, they had been rubbed down thoroughly, and they came up to the scratch smilingly, feeling comparatively fresh and ready for the last struggle.

Rains had regained his confidence, for he reasoned that though Merriwell had beaten him fairly and squarely in a hurdle race, he could not repeat the trick in a straight dash.

Rains believed he had lost in clearing the hurdles, not having done the trick with as much skill as Merriwell.

In this he was right. He had jumped too high in every instance, while Frank had barely seemed to skim over the hurdles without touching them.

Paul found that his circle of friends had dwindled, and those who remained were not over-enthusiastic or confident.

"All this will change in a moment when I defeat Merriwell in the dash," he told himself. "It is this final race which decides who is the best man. We stand tied at the present time."

This was quite true. Frank had thought of that, and he felt that the time had come when he must not be defeated. A sort of cool determination had taken possession of him, and he had made up his mind that Rains should not come off victor.

There was a great hush of expectancy when the two lads lined up. Then the starter's voice was heard directing them to make ready.

A moment later the pistol spoke, and away leaped the young gladiators.

Side by side they started, and that position was held for thirty yards, neither seeming to gain or lose an inch.

Then Rains fell back a foot or two; but, before the half-way point was reached, he forged back to Frank's side, and so, shoulder to shoulder, they sped down toward the tape.

A hoarse murmur of applause greeted Rains' display of pluck as he recovered the position he had lost.

Frank was doing his level best, and still Rains clung like a leech to his side. Try as he might, Frank could not shake Paul off in the next forty yards.

The excitement was great, for there had been no such spirited and plucky race for the day. Neither lad seemed to have an inch of advantage, and it began to look as if they would finish in that manner.

Still that look of unyielding resolution and determination was on Frank Merriwell's face.

On the other hand, Paul Rains' face wore a look of pain, and it was plain that he could not hold out much longer. Pride and pluck had caused him to exert his

energies as never before in all his life had he exerted them.

Had he been able to leap to the front at a bound and defeat Merriwell in the last foot of the race, he would have made that leap even though he knew it would cause his death.

It is lads with such pluck as this who make records in the race of life.

But Paul was unable to make that final needed leap.

On the other hand, Frank had a last bit of unspent energy in store, and he flung himself to the front so that he struck the tape two feet in advance of his rival, doing the distance in the remarkable time of ten seconds.

Paul stumbled across the line, and, his entire strength leaving him in a second, fell headlong to the ground.

Frank ran on a little distance, slackened, reeled, and fell into the arms of Bart Hodge, a smile on his face as he panted:

"That was a dandy!"

Things reeled around him, and he seemed to hear hoarse cheering that was miles and miles away. In the midst of the cheering he heard the familiar academy yell, and heard the voices of his companions roaring his name to the skies.

"Oh, Frank, Frank, you did not let him beat you! I knew you wouldn't—I knew it!"

The words sounded in his very ears, and yet he heard them faintly. He recognized Hodge's voice, and through a rose-colored mist he seemed to see the face of his faithful friend and comrade.

"No," he replied in a whisper, "he didn't beat me, but —he came mighty near it!"

"Water here—bring water!" shouted Hodge. "Be quick about it, too!"

Water was brought. Some was placed on Frank's temples and wrists, and a dipperful was held to his lips.

He drank, and seemed to recover with surprising swiftness, soon standing erect, and pushing aside those who would have supported him.

"Where's Rains?" he asked, looking around.

"He fell just as he crossed the line," was the answer. "The crowd there are gathered around him."

In a moment Frank strode into the crowd, thrusting cadets to the right and left, and quickly reached Paul's side.

Paul was sitting up, supported by Harvey Dare. He did not seem to comprehend what had taken place, and Frank heard him ask:

"Where am I? How did I come here?"

"You are at the end of the hundred-yard line, old man," said Frank, "and your feet brought you here with such speed that I had to hurry or be left."

Paul gazed at Frank a moment, and then he slowly said:

"You beat me."

"Well, I'll never go round bragging about it," was the instant reply. "I believe I did strike the tape first, but you weren't a mile behind. Rains, you can run like an express train!"

Paul looked sad and dejected, his breast heaving. Frank held out his hand.

"Shake, old man—shake! You should not take this kind of a defeat to heart, for it can scarcely be called a defeat. We are as nearly matched for one hundred yards as two fellows can be."

Paul hesitated a moment, but he could not refuse that hand, and he said:

"You are generous, Merriwell; but you rate me too high. This race satisfies me on one point—I am no

match for you. I could not make such time again if I were to try a year. Merriwell, you are a wonder!"

Frank's generosity, his honest, manly nature, had conquered Rains completely. They shook hands warmly, and at that moment each felt that he was ready to fight for the other.

With the exception of a few sore-heads, the cadets all seemed delighted by the outcome of the race, and the good-will shown between Merriwell and Rains.

Rupert Reynolds drew away by himself, his heart full of bitterness.

"I hate a softy who will knuckle down when he is beaten!" he thought. "Rains makes me sick!"

The delighted cadets seized Frank, and lifted him to their shoulders to bear him from the field.

"Rains, too," he demanded. "Put me down, or take Rains up."

So Paul Rains was caught up, and the rivals—rivals no longer—were carried in triumph from the field of honor, where that day they had displayed their courage and manhood.

The crowd cheered, the band played "The Conquering Hero Comes," and the excitement of the day was over.

A few moments later the road to Fardale was black with people hurrying from the grounds.

There were no awards. The boys had simply struggled to break old records and make new ones for Fardale Academy. Merriwell and Rains were the only ones who succeeded in this.

In celebration of the event, it was decided to have a display of fireworks, burn tar barrels, and fire a salute that evening.

Permission for this jollification was easily and readily secured, and then the boys "chipped in" to make up a purse for the necessary outlay. Hodge, who happened

to be flush, was generous. He felt more than delighted over the result of the day, and he dropped twenty dollars into the purse.

Rupert Reynolds could not be found, and so he escaped contributing anything.

Tar barrels were purchased in Fardale, and a supply of fireworks was ordered from the nearest city, to be shipped so they would arrive in Fardale on the train that passed through at eight-thirty. This order was sent by telephone, and the dealer in fireworks replied that he would do his best to fill the order.

The entire town of Fardale was cordially invited to the celebration, and the stock of fireworks left over on the hands of a local dealer from the Fourth of July was secured, so they would have something in case the large order did not arrive.

The people of the village turned out well that evening, the thundering boom of a cannon telling them that the jollification was about to begin.

This celebration was in every way a success. The fireworks arrived at eight-thirty, and were immediately brought post haste to the academy.

Tar barrels blazed, the cannon boomed, trumpets blared, and then Frank Merriwell was called on for a speech.

Laughing and blushing, Frank was lifted to the top of a box, and a cheer went up. This was repeated three times, and gave him time to recover his composure sufficiently to say a few appropriate words, which were warmly received.

As he finished, somebody cried:

"Tell us what happened in the first hundred-yard dash, Merriwell—explain why you fell."

"That's it—that's it!" was the general cry that went up. "Tell us! We want to know!"

"Well," said Frank, "I can tell you in a very few words."

At that moment he caught sight of Rupert Reynolds' face, which bore a look of absolute terror, and was turned toward him in a mute appeal.

That was enough; that appeal sealed Frank's lips.

"I can tell you in a very few words," he repeated, "but it would do you no good to know, and it would harm somebody else if I told. For those reasons, I shall remain silent."

That was all; he could not be persuaded to tell.

"I am glad you decline to tell," thought Hugh Bascomb. "I happen to know, and I propose to work my knowledge for all it is worth. Reynolds shall pay for the fun he has had, and as long as he pays well, I will keep his secret."

Rupert was not to escape punishment for his dastardly act.

As soon as possible, Frank escaped from his comrades and friends, and found Inza, who, in company with May Blossom and Paul Rains, was waiting for him.

"I am so glad you have come!" she said. "You won't have to go away again, will you?"

"What, never?" he whispered, as he sat down by her side and covertly secured her hand.

"I didn't say that," she protested.

"But you meant it, didn't you?"

She stammered.

"Why—I—I—— Oh, see that rocket! Isn't it beautiful?"

The display of fireworks had begun, and she did not answer Frank's question.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AN EVENTFUL NIGHT.

A few days later there was trouble brewing at Fardale Military Academy.

Hugh Bascomb was under arrest, and confined in the guard tent, charged with brutally assaulting and beating Rupert Reynolds, without cause or provocation.

Reynolds had not been seriously injured, but he declined to tell how the affair came about. It was found to be quite useless to question him.

Nor did Bascomb seem inclined to talk much. When closely questioned, he simply answered:

"I will tell a few things at the regular investigation."

These words were repeated to Reynolds, and they seemed to make him look decidedly anxious and uneasy.

Reynolds became restless. He moved about through the encampment when at liberty to do so, and was seen talking earnestly in low tones to several of his particular friends.

Bart Hodge noted these movements, and, happening to come upon Frank, he said:

"There's something in the wind, old man."

"What is it—air?" asked Frank, with a twinkle in his merry eyes, and a faint smile on his face.

"I'm not chaffing."

"No? Then what's up?"

"I don't know just what it is, but Reynolds is in it."

"He seems to be in everything lately."

"He's up to some kind of a game. You know he refused to tell why Bascomb thumped him?"

"Yes."

"Well, he is collaring all his friends and talking them into the earache. That means something."

Frank nodded.

"You're right; Reynolds always calls on his friends when he gets into a scrape."

"But he doesn't seem to be in any scrape. Bascomb is the one who——"

"Remember that Bascomb promised to tell a few things at the regular investigation."

"Well?"

"It's my opinion Reynolds had a great deal rather Bascomb would not tell."

"What has that to do with the way he is running round and chinning his friends?"

"Possibly a good deal. He may be trying to scratch up evidence to refute any charge Bascomb makes."

"Or he may be up to something else."

"What?"

"That I don't know, but I've got an idea that Reynolds is desperate, and ready for anything. I'd give something to find out what kind of a scheme he is trying to work."

"Keep cool, and we will find out later on."

"I suppose that's all we can do."

It was true that Reynolds worked very hard among his friends, or those who pretended to be his friends. Rupert had money to spend freely, and he had gathered about himself a number of boy sycophants, who were ready to show extreme friendliness as long as the money lasted. There was no heart or sincerity in this kind of friendship, but it seemed the only kind of regard that Reynolds was able to win.

Rupert had not ceased to dislike Frank thoroughly, although Frank had spared him when exposure would have meant disgrace and dismissal.

Bascomb liked Frank no better than did Rupert, and these two lads had seemed to be the very best friends up to the time that Reynolds received the beating at Bascomb's hands.

Bascomb had allowed a burst of temper to get the best of him, and he had shown very poor judgment in attacking Rupert within the confines of the cadet encampment, where he had been quickly dragged from his victim and placed under arrest.

Hodge's words caused Frank to note Rupert's movements, and he saw that the fellow was really up to something. He had more or less difficulty in bringing his friends to his way of thinking, but he appeared to succeed in almost every case.

At supper there were rumors of a great lark to come, but what it meant only a select few of the cadets seemed to know.

They were to find out that night.

Bascomb slept in the guard tent, with armed sentries on the four sides.

Thirty minutes before the time to relieve the guard arrived, the sentries were assailed by overwhelming numbers.

As the night was very dark, the assailants had been able to creep close in upon the sentries without being challenged, and had attacked them at a signal agreed upon.

It is possible some of the sentries were in the plot, for the resistance, with a single exception, seemed feeble.

One fellow fought savagely, discharging his gun, and shouting for the officer of the guard.

But while he was fighting the assaulting party accom-

plished their purpose, and he was finally knocked down, and left dazed and stunned, while the assailants disappeared as swiftly as they had appeared.

It was all over when Lieutenant Gordan and the officer of the guard arrived on the scene.

A hurried investigation showed that Bascomb was gone. Either he had been set at liberty, or carried away!

"Turn out the entire camp!" raged Lieutenant Gordan. "This is outrageous! Somebody shall suffer for this piece of work!"

In another moment, bugles sounded, and the muffled roar of drums was heard.

The long roll was given, and, in obedience to this signal, the cadets came hurrying from their tents, to fall in, in class companies, on the parade ground.

The roll was called, and it was found that ten cadets failed to answer to their names. Reynolds, Bascomb, Snell, and Harris were among the missing.

Lieutenant Gordan, who was thoroughly aroused and angry, gave orders for the arrest of every one of the ten.

But not one of the missing returned to their tents that night, and in the morning they were still absent from camp.

Once, years before, there had been a revolt among the cadets at Fardale Academy, and it began to look as if something of the kind had occurred again.

Now it was plain enough to both Merriwell and Hodge what Reynolds had been doing the previous afternoon and evening.

The attack on the guard tent and release of the prisoner had been planned by Rupert, who was the leader of the movement.

Every one of his comrades in the attack were fellows who did not bear the best of reputations and whose rec-

ords since entering the academy had not been of the best order.

Some of them were cadets who had barely escaped dismissal on various occasions, and who seemed to court such a fate in this case. Two or three were weak-minded fellows, who were easily influenced by Reynolds.

Lieutenant Gordan declared that not one of the ten should escape just and proper punishment.

Without delay, he instructed Frank to form a picked company of twenty cadets, and go in pursuit of the rebels.

"Take twenty men you can depend on, Mr. Merriwell," he said, "and do not return to camp until you have effected the capture of the deserters."

CHAPTER XXV.

SAILOR JACK.

Frank was well pleased to think he had been selected to take charge of the force that was going in pursuit of the rebels, and he was still more pleased when Lieutenant Gordan directed him to select his company for the expedition.

It did not take him long to decide on the twenty cadets he preferred. Among them were Bart Hodge, Barney Mulloy, Hans Dunnerwust, Ephraim Gallup and Fred Davis.

As the first movement, Hodge and Mulloy were sent out as scouts to discover whither the deserters had gone.

Mulloy was gone less than two hours, when he returned and reported that the rebels seemed to have fled in the direction of Blue Lake, a large sheet of water about five miles away.

Frank waited a while for Hodge, but Bart did not show up, and further delay was not thought advisable, so the company marched away, escorted to the limits of the academy grounds by the cadet drum corps and two of the regular companies. The drum corps played a lively march, and the cadets were permitted to give a farewell cheer, as Frank marched his picked command away.

Frank had requested Lieutenant Gordan to send Hodge on after them, if he showed up at camp.

Frank chose the shortest route to Blue Lake.

On the northern shore of this sheet of water lay a large

strip of forest, known as Ten-Mile Woods. From Barney's report, Frank was led to believe the deserters had fled to the shelter of this wild section.

Frequent inquiries along the road failed to give any satisfaction till near noon, when they came to a farmhouse within half-a-mile of the lake.

The farmer informed them that a party of ten cadets, who said they were on a vacation, had taken breakfast there. He had thought it strange that boys on a vacation should be carrying muskets, and nine of them were thus armed.

One of them had paid for what they had eaten, and then they purchased potatoes, flour, pork, beans, salt, pepper, coffee, and other provisions of him, together with a kettle, fryingpan, coffeepot, and so forth.

When he heard this, Frank looked serious, for it was evident that the deserters were determined on a genuine rebellion, having no thought of returning to the academy for some time.

Although the farmer had been pretty well cleaned out of food and provisions, his wife agreed to get up some kind of a dinner for the boys, if they would wait for her to cook it.

This Frank decided to do, and, while they were waiting for dinner, he held a council with all of his company, at which he informed them that Hodge was second in command, and would have full control whenever he was absent.

The boys were inclined to consider the whole affair a great lark, but, while he was enjoying it, Frank began to see that they had serious work before them.

Knowing their punishment would be severe in any case, and believing it would be no more severe if they took a vacation and refused to return to the academy until

compelled to do so, the rebels plainly meant to stay away as long as possible.

Frank wondered what could have become of Bart, as he had expected to meet him somewhere on the march.

It was some time past noon when the farmer's wife announced that dinner was ready for the first ten.

The meal consisted mainly of boiled potatoes, butter gravy, stripped codfish, and cornmeal bread.

This fare was certainly of the plainest sort, but the boys took hold heartily, and they seemed to enjoy it immensely.

The meal over, they took up the march again, soon reaching the lake and the edge of the Ten-Mile Woods.

Within sight of the lake lived a strange old fellow, who was a sort of recluse. He had once been a sailor and it was hinted by those who claimed to know that his record on the high seas would not bear close investigation. No one had the boldness to assert that he had once been a smuggler and pirate, but it was said that he knew a great deal about people who had followed such unlawful callings.

He had given his name as Jack Duff, and he was known in the vicinity as "Old Jack," or "Sailor Jack."

He was a fierce, grizzled old fellow, whose language was plentifully sprinkled with strange sailor oaths, and who always wore a belt, which supported a sheath that contained a long-bladed, murderous-looking knife.

Some time in his career, Sailor Jack had lost his left leg near the knee, and he wore a wooden "peg" in place of the missing member. His right eye was smaller than the left, and, when he was angry, seemed to glow like a coal.

It was said that Jack had been rather free with his money when he first settled near Blue Lake, but the fact that his money was always in gold, and often in strange

pieces of foreign countries, excited the curiosity of the people in that vicinity, some of whom ventured to ask him where he got it.

The old salt had resented their inquisitiveness, and he flatly told them it was none of their business. After that he seemed to draw into his shell, like a turtle, and he grew to resent any attempt at friendliness, so that people came to fear and avoid him.

Regularly once a week he visited the groggery in Fardale, and purchased a supply of rum, for which he continued to pay in gold, and all the pieces being dated far back, it seemed to indicate they had been hoarded.

The story got around that Old Jack was the possessor of large treasure, which he had secreted somewhere about the wretched old house in which he lived.

The old sailor knew this story was in circulation, and he seemed to fear that he would be robbed. He regarded everybody with suspicion, and he became more and more cross and ugly as years advanced. More than once it had been declared that he would murder somebody in time, if he continued to grow suspicious and fierce.

This strange old fellow seemed to avoid as far as possible the sea coast, but he was not able to give up his sailor habits, and so, with great labor and pains, he built himself a small two-masted schooner, which he launched on Blue Lake.

Strangely enough, he named this schooner *Captain Kidd,* which caused the country people to regard him with still greater suspicion.

He had arranged running lines, so that he could sit with his feet in the cock-pit and his hand on the tiller, and trim the sails without leaving the helm.

Whenever a wild storm came up, Jack would repair aboard the schooner, get up anchor and sails, and go cruising around over the lake in a way that told how

much he enjoyed such tempestuous sport. How he succeeded in handling the schooner all alone was more than could be told, but he did so, and he did not mind that the country people prophesied he would be drowned some day. Some of them would have been not a little relieved if this had actually happened, but Jack refused to be drowned, although the sails were blown out of the *Captain Kidd* once or twice.

There were lads in the academy who sometimes visited Old Carter's groggery in Fardale village, and there they heard a great deal about Sailor Jack, so his history since his appearance in the neighborhood became well known among the cadets.

The moment Frank came in sight of Old Jack's house, he recognized the place from descriptions he had received of it.

The boys marched briskly down the old road, little looking for what was to take place.

As they approached the house, Old Jack came round the corner and saw them. He paused and glared at them in amazement, and then he went stumping into the house as fast as his wooden peg would carry him.

In a moment he reappeared, and the boys were not a little surprised to see that he grasped a long-barreled, old-fashioned gun.

"Lay to, there, ye lubbers!" roared the man, bringing the breech of the gun to his shoulder and pointing it at the lads—"lay to, or, shiver my timbers, if I don't give ye a broadside!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

HODGE IN TROUBLE.

"Shimminy Gristmas!" gurgled Hans Dunnerwust, in great alarm. "Uf he don'd peen bointing dot gun sdraight ad me!"

"G'wan, ye Dutch chaze!" cried Barney Mulloy. "Ye can't see straight, ye spalpane! It's mesilf th' ould odamahon is pointing th' gun at."

"Wal, I be gol dinged if ye ain't both blind ez moles!" palpitated Ephraim Gallup, trying to dodge behind somebody else. "He's got that thunderin' ole cannon p'inted at me!"

"Halt!" commanded Frank, promptly.

The company having come to a halt, he addressed Sailor Jack:

"What is the meaning of this, sir?" came sternly from his lips. "You are liable to get yourself into serious trouble."

"Avast there!" rumbled the old tar, his right eye filled with a red fire. "I mean business, keelhaul me if I don't. I want pay for my dog and my windows, and I'll have it, or I'll give ye the contents of this gun, and you may lay to that, my beauties!"

"What have we to do with your dog and your windows? You are crazy, man!"

"If you didn't break my windows and shoot my dog, it was a lot of lubbers dressed like you, and you're all from the academy, so you will pay the damages."

Frank instantly understood that Reynolds and his gang had been pestering the old tar.

"It must have been the party we were sent out to capture," he said. "How did they happen to smash your windows and shoot your dog?"

"How did they happen to!" roared the sailor, fiercely. "They done it when I refused to let them have *Cap'n Kidd* to go sailing on the lake. Then they took to stoning the house and breaking out the windows. When I cast Gibbs adrift and sicked him at 'em, they shot him full of lead, shiver my timbers if they didn't!"

"Well, we have nothing to do with that. Those fellows revolted, and we were sent out after them."

"What's that? They're mutineers?"

"Yes."

"You're sure there're none of 'em with you?"

"Dead sure."

The old man seemed to hesitate a minute, and then, as he thought of the death of his dog, he grew furious again.

"You're all from the same vessel!" he snarled. "If I don't collect of you, I won't get anything at all, so you're going to pay for my windows and my dog before you hoist anchor and get under way again, and you may lay to that, my hearties!"

"But we refuse to pay for the damage done by those deserters. At the same time, if you will call at the academy, and present your claim to Professor Gunn, I have no doubt but he will see that you are remunerated for your loss."

"That don't go with me, mate. I believe in collecting when I have the chance, so fork over twenty dollars before I give you a broadside that will blow you clean out of the water."

"Will you listen to reason, or——"

"Hand over the cash, you lubber, and be lively about it! I am a bad man to fool with, and I may take a notion to shoot first and collect afterward."

Frank turned to his company.

"Prepare to load!"

His order rang out sharp and clear, and it was obeyed with mechanical accuracy.

"Load!"

Nineteen blank cartridges were snapped into nineteen guns.

Sailor Jack did not know the cartridges were blank, and he looked somewhat astonished and uneasy.

"What do you mean, you scoundrel?" he shouted.

"We are simply preparing for the emergency," replied Frank, coolly, not a smile changing the expression of his face, although he felt like laughing outright at the sudden change which had come over the sailor. "In case you fire into us, we are going to do a little shooting, too. You will have a lively time dodging nineteen bullets."

"Shiver my timbers!" gurgled Jack, hesitatingly. "You wouldn't dare to fire!"

"You will find you are greatly mistaken if you shoot into us."

"And you won't pay for my windows?"

"Not a window."

"Nor my dog?"

"Nary dog."

"And blow me if I don't believe you'd like an excuse to shoot me!" gasped the fierce old tar. who had been quite set back by the stand Merriwell had taken. "Of all the murderous young cutthroats I ever saw, you're the worst! But I'll fool ye, keelhaul me if I don't! I won't give ye any excuse for shooting, but I'll get even with ye some way, and you may lay to that, my hearties!"

Having thus delivered himself, Old Jack turned squarely about and pegged away, trying to appear as dignified as possible.

"That's the way to suppress a fierce and bloodthirsty

pirate!" laughed Frank. "He may take a fancy to shoot at us from some place of shelter, so we will move along. Shoulder arms; forward, march!"

Away they went down the old road, more than half-expecting the man with the gun would shoot after them; but he did nothing of the kind, and they passed without further trouble.

At the edge of the woods Frank halted his men.

"We have had no trouble in tracing the deserters thus far," he said. "It is likely they are somewhere in the shelter of this strip of forest, and we must find out just where they are. They are liable to be somewhere near the shore of the lake. Still, they may have entered by this road. This road, as you can see, is seldom traveled. It was once the only road between Edgefield and Fardale, but there is now a shorter and more direct route, which causes the road through Ten-Mile Woods to be avoided. If ten men have marched into the forest by this road, they must have left marks on the ground, and some of us will be able to find those marks."

He then selected two lads besides himself, and they went forward to examine the road in search for the trail left by the deserters.

It was not long before they found all the trail they desired, making it plain the fellows they were pursuing had entered the woods by that road.

While thus engaged, Frank fancied he heard a faint, far-away shout. They all listened, and, after a time, it was repeated.

"They are not far away," observed one of the boys. "I fancy that was one of them shouting."

"It sounded like a cry of distress," said Frank.

"Perhaps one of them has strayed away from the others and is lost."

"Possibly."

Having found that the deserters had entered the forest by way of the road, Frank lost little time in marching forward.

The company had not proceeded far before an old wood road was seen leading off to the right toward the lake.

Another investigation showed that Reynolds and his friends had left the main road and taken to the wood road.

And now the cries could be plainly heard at intervals, and, more than at first, they sounded like cries of distress.

Down the wood road hurried Frank, at the head of the party.

There was a strangely familiar sound to those cries.

Some of the boys were for answering, but Frank would not allow this, as it might warn the enemy of their proximity.

In a very short time they were near to the person who was uttering the cries, and, despite the fact that this individual's voice was hoarse from much shouting, Frank believed he recognized it.

"Forward!" he commanded. "It is Hodge!"

"That's pwhat Oi thought mesilf," said Barney Mulloy, excitedly. "Th' b'y's in some kind av a schrape."

They were now guided by the shouts, but did not find it necessary to abandon the old wood road.

In a very short time they came in sight of a lad who was standing with his back to a tree, and, as they came nearer, they made a surprising discovery.

It was Bart Hodge, sure enough, and he was bound to the tree!

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE HERMIT.

Hodge gave a cry of relief when his eyes rested on his approaching comrades.

"Help!" he called, and, now that rescue was at hand, his voice sank to a whisper.

Frank dashed forward.

"Bart, what does this mean? Who did this?"

"Set me free, old man. I am nearly dead from being tied up here so long."

Frank quickly produced a pocketknife, and cut the cords which held the unfortunate fellow to the tree. On being thus released, Bart collapsed, and fell in a heap at the foot of the tree, while the excited and wondering boys gathered around him.

It was some moments before Hodge seemed in condition to talk, and then, sitting up and placing his back against the tree, he said:

"It seems to me as if I had been tied up here for a week. I didn't mind it at first, but it became the most painful torture after a while. I'd begun to think I'd never succeed in making anybody hear me. Oh, won't I get square for this!"

"How did it happen?" asked Frank. "Who tied you to the tree?"

"The rebels."

"Reynolds and his gang?"

"Yes."

"But how did they happen to have the opportunity to tie you up in such a manner?"

"I ran into an ambush."

"They found you were after them, and set a trap for you?"

"Just that."

"The scoundrels! I didn't think they would dare do such a thing."

"I didn't know I was anywhere near them till they suddenly sprang up all around me," Hodge explained. "I saw I was in a trap, but I did not propose to give up tamely, and so I tried to break away. I got a good crack at Bascomb, and I knocked him flat the first pop. But it wasn't any use, for they just jumped on me and crushed me down. I had to give up."

The boys were listening with breathless interest, and Frank urged Bart to go on.

"I didn't suppose they would dare punish me; but they held a sort of trial, and convicted me of being a spy. I was sentenced to be hanged. They had a big bundle, tied up with a rope. Part of the rope was taken off the bundle, and my hands were tied, for all that I fought. Then they made a noose, which they put around my neck, and pretended they really meant to hang me. But they could not scare me in that way; so Bascomb, whose left eye I buttoned up when I hit him, proposed that I be stripped to the waist, tied to the tree, and whipped with withes. He was bound to make me beg. They fell to quarreling over this, for Reynolds was against it. It divided them into two parties, but Reynolds had five supporters, and Bascomb had three, so the big bully was forced to give in. Then it was decided that I should be tied up here, and left till somebody released me. They tied me up, and I have been here ever since."

"When were you tied to the tree?"

"Some time this forenoon."

"And you have been there ever since! No wonder you were pretty well exhausted."

"It was terrible," declared Bart. "I wouldn't go through it again for a hundred dollars."

"Dot vos righd," nodded Hans, who had been listening with his mouth wide open. "I vos ruter haf a huntret tollars than do dot meinself."

"I told Bascomb I would be even with him," said Bart, "and I am going to keep my word."

"I should think they would fear punishment when they return to the academy."

"They don't mean to return till they are obliged to do so. Besides that, you know Bascomb hates me for an old score. He says I went back on him, and he wanted to tie me up and flog me to get even. He would have done it if it hadn't been for Reynolds; but Rupert was scared, and so I escaped."

"Which way did they go when they left you?"

"Toward the lake."

"Then we'll follow."

"I am not going to follow far till I have something to eat. I am nearly starved."

"I don't wonder. Davis."

"Yes, sir," promptly replied Fred Davis, stepping forward and saluting.

"Conduct Mr. Hodge to the farmhouse where we took dinner. Tell the people there that it is barely possible we may call for supper."

"All right, sir."

In a few moments Bart and Fred were on their way back to the farmhouse, while Frank led his company toward the lake.

Deep in the heart of the woods they came upon an old hut, from the chimney of which smoke was issuing.

"I wonder who lives there?" speculated Frank.

"Mebbe them rebels are in there," suggested Ephraim Gallup, nervously.

"It is possible. We will surround the house. Let no one escape. Forward!"

They dashed forward at a run, and quickly surrounded the old hut.

The front door was partly open, and a small, cur-like dog stood in the opening, snarling and showing his teeth.

"Get out!" shouted Frank, making a kick at the dog.

The creature plunged into the hut and disappeared.

Merriwell hesitated but a moment, and then he pushed open the door and walked in, followed closely by Barney, Ephraim, and Hans.

The hut seemed to consist of but one room, at the further end of which was an open fire, on which some green wood was smoldering and sending up a thick smoke. On the floor, or, rather, on the ground, in one corner was a wretched bed. There was a table, one chair, some blackened tin dishes hung around the walls, and that was about all.

Apparently the place was deserted.

"Shimminy Gristmas!" gurgled Hans. "Vot kindt uf a blace dis pee, ain'd id?"

"Don't seem to be nobody to hum," muttered Ephraim Gallup, in a scared whisper. "Guess we'd better be goin'."

"It must be the hut of Black Tom, the hermit, of whom such queer stories are told," said Frank.

"Thin, begobs, it's mesilf thot fales loike movin'," said Barney. "Oi'd raythor make a call on Sailor Jack, so Oi had."

"Yaw, dot vos so," gurgled Hans. "Dot Plack Dom he peen shut up a brison in, und he got avay oudt py killing der guard, ain'd id?"

"That is the story they tell of him," affirmed Frank.

"If all they tell about the old fellow is true, he would make a good mate for Sailor Jack."

"They lie! they lie! they lie!" quavered a feeble voice.

With exclamations of surprise, the boys turned to see between them and the door the bent form of an old man, who was leaning on a crooked cane, and at whose heels the wretched dog was crouching. The old man's hair and beard were white, and his hands trembled from old age. He presented a most pitiful spectacle of ruin, want, and wretchedness.

In strong contrast to his white hair and beard was his dark skin, which was wrinkled and flabby. His eyes, however, seemed to have retained the fire and brilliancy of youth, and they were very keen and piercing.

The old man was dressed in ragged clothes, and the boots on his feet were held together by strings. He wore no hat.

It was not surprising the boys were startled, for they had not seen the man when they entered, and he seemed to have materialized out of the air.

Several lads were looking in at the door of the hut, and they afterward declared they were unable to tell whence the old man had come. It seemed as if he had risen from out of the ground which composed the floor of the hut.

Frank Merriwell's nerves were not easily shaken, and he saw nothing to fear about the aged and feeble-appearing old man.

"We beg your pardon for intruding, sir," he said, with the respect and politeness due an aged person.

The man looked at him keenly, searchingly.

"You are the first one to beg Black Tom's pardon in years," he faltered, as if thoroughly astonished.

"Well, sir, I am quite aware we have no right here, and it is proper that we all beg your pardon."

"Right!" exclaimed the old hermit, bitterly. "Who considers the right of the weak and friendless!"

"I do, for one."

"Then you are an exception—you are a wonder. It is the way of the world to trample on the weak and helpless—to crush them. The world does not give a man any rights unless he is strong enough to defend them. Boy, what is your name?"

"Frank Merriwell."

"A good name, and that is a good face you have. I am something of a character-reader, although I may be old and wretched. I see fine things in that face—brave things, manly things, noble things! You are sincere in all you do, and you have great moral stamina and strength of character. In the battle of life, you are pretty sure to come forth a winner."

"Thank you."

"You have nothing to thank me for, Frank Merriwell, as I am simply telling you the truth, as revealed by your face. Frank is a good name, for it suggests openness, honesty, heartiness. Merriwell seems to suggest a jovial nature and a strong spirit. I believe I never before knew of a person whose name fitted him so well."

"By gum!" Ephraim Gallup was heard to whisper, "the old feller ain't no fool, arter all!"

As for Frank, he was not a little taken back by the words of the strange man of the woods, but he said:

"All I can ask is that you have read my character aright."

"I am sure of that," declared Black Tom. "Never in my life have I made a mistake in such matters. If I had seen by your face that you were a sneak and a scoundrel, I should have told you so just as readily. It is my frankness in such things that drove me to be what I am—an outcast and a hermit. Men who did evil things shunned

me and turned other men against me. They seemed to think that I could read the black secrets of their hearts because they carried the truth written on their faces. Now they point me out with scorn, and say I am a criminal—that I am hiding from the grasp of the law."

The hermit's voice rose to a shrill cry, and he shook his cane angrily in the air, causing the boys to fall back. In doing this Hans tripped, and sat down heavily on the ground, which brought a grunt from his lips.

"Atch! Dot came near mein prains to knock oudt!" he exclaimed.

Frank saw the hermit was getting excited, and, not knowing what the man might do, he fancied it would be best to move on as soon as possible. First, however, he would ask the old man if he had seen anything of the rebels, and he did so.

Immediately, Black Tom showed signs of mingled anger and alarm.

"Yes, I saw such a party," he acknowledged, although he seemed to do so reluctantly.

"How long ago?"

"Some hours."

"They passed this hut?"

"They stopped here a while."

"For what purpose?"

"To have sport with me!" cried the old man, bitterly. "They thought it great fun to beat my dog and threaten to serve me the same."

These words seemed wrung from his lips against his will, as Frank observed. This aspect of fear aroused Merriwell's curiosity. He desired to know just what it meant.

"So they threatened you?" he asked.

"Yes," whispered the hermit his eyes moving restlessly about.

"But they did you no personal injury?"

"No."

"And they all departed together?"

Black Tom was silent.

"Tell me the truth, man!" cried Frank. "Are they gone? Are you not hiding them near at hand?"

"They are gone."

"All of them?"

Again the hermit was silent, but Frank saw his eyes turn a flitting glance toward the peak of the hut, where some crossed poles and a thin layer of bark and brush made a small loft.

That was quite enough for Frank.

"Boys," he cried, "a spy has remained behind to listen to our conversation!"

"Where is he? Show him to us! We'll fix him!"

"Dot vos richt! Show me to him!" bellowed Hans, in great excitement. "Oh, he won't do a thing to me!"

"He is within reach," declared Frank.

"Let me put me hand on th' spalpane!" shouted Barney.

"Fix bayonets!" ordered Merriwell.

Clatter, rattle, snap!

"See the loft up there? You can all reach it, and your bayonets will pierce the bark and brush. If the spy is there, he'll be likely to get prodded. Ready to stir him up!"

The boys made ready.

Before Frank could give the command, however, a shrill cry of terror rang through the hut, following which a portion of the loft gave way, and down came a sprawling human figure amid a mass of bark and broken poles

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A SPY.

The person who had fallen thus scrambled to his feet as soon as he struck the ground, attempting to rush out of the hut.

"Seize him!" cried Frank.

A broken pole had struck Ephraim Gallup on the head and knocked him down. The Vermonter was on the ground, but he was within easy reach of the spy's feet, and he clutched one of them, crying:

"Hold right on there, b'gosh! Don't be in sech a rush!"

The spy was tripped up, but he jerked his foot from Ephraim's grasp, and again scrambled up and made a break for the door.

He ran plump into Hans Dunnerwust, who fastened to the fellow with a desperate clutch, and down they went together, the Dutch boy squawking:

"Hellup! hellup! Shimminy Gristmas! If I don'd hellup you I vos a deat man alretty yet!"

Ready hands clutched the spy, who was dragged to his feet, and the boys obtained a fair look at his face.

"Wat Snell!" cried Frank.

Wat Snell it was, and he looked thoroughly frightened and ashamed.

"Dud-dud-don't hurt me, bub-bub-bub-boys!" he quavered, his knees shaking beneath him.

Frank immediately saw an opportunity to have some sport, and give Wat a bad scare at the same time.

"You shall have a fair trial, Snell," he said, "and, if you can prove your innocence, you'll not be hanged."

"Oh, say!" mumbled Wat, forcing a laugh; "you can't work that kind of a racket on me. I'm not afraid of being shot, but I didn't know—I kind of thought—that is, I suspected——"

He broke down completely, but his eyes were moving about in a restless manner, as if searching for some one.

"You suspected what?" demanded Frank, sharply. "I fancy I know. You thought Bart Hodge might feel like settling a part of his account against your gang. It is possible he may feel that way. But we are going to try you as a deserter and a spy. As I said before, if you are able to prove your innocence, you shall not be hanged."

Then, directed by Frank, they removed the captive from the hut to the open air, where he was quickly surrounded.

Frank bade the hermit good-day, but Black Tom seemed greatly agitated, and he caught hold of the boy, saying:

"They will come back and keep their word—I know they will!"

"Who—the party that visited you first?"

"Yes."

"I scarcely think there is much danger of that, for they will not be given the opportunity—if I can help it. They are fugitives and deserters from Fardale Academy, and I was sent out to capture them. They will avoid me, if possible."

"Well, I am sure you will be successful in the end; but keep them from returning here, if possible. Why, they even threatened to burn my cabin, saying it would be a good thing if I were driven from these parts."

Frank had heard other persons make such a statement, but he did not say so then, for he pitied the wretched old

man who lived a hermit's life there in the heart of Ten-Mile Woods.

Leaving the hut, Frank found the cadets gathered about Snell, who now looked thoroughly chagrined and disgusted.

"We will organize an impromptu court-martial," said Frank. "No time is to be wasted in carrying this matter through."

"Bring out Black Tom," suggested Paul Rains. "We need him as a witness."

"That's right!" cried the boys, those who had remained outside being eager to get a better view of the old hermit.

Frank stepped back to the door of the hut, when, to his amazement, he saw that the place was empty. Black Tom had disappeared in a most surprising manner.

Into the hut Frank plunged, looking around for the old man, for he knew Black Tom had not left the place by the door, which was the only exit.

But the hermit was actually gone, nor was his wretched dog to be seen.

Puzzled and mystified, Frank went out and told the boys of this astonishing disappearance.

The boys could not believe it possible that Black Tom had vanished thus unaccountably, but none of them seemed to care about investigating.

"Pwhoy don't ye go in an' foind th' ould gent, Dutchy?" asked Barney Mulloy, with a sly twinkle in his eyes.

"Say, you come righd avay off, Parney!" exclaimed Hans. "Vy don'd you do him yourseluf, hey?"

"I'll tell ye one thing," spoke up Ephraim Gallup, as he moved still farther from the cabin; "yeou don't git me inter that air hole ag'in, if I know myself! Darned if I don't b'lieve it'd scare me aout of a year's growth to go in there naow."

"Vell, dot peen a goot thing vor you, Ephy," declared Hans. "Uf you grown some taller you don'd peen aple to go der door uf a house in mitoudt knockin' your bompadour down, ain'd id?"

"Well, there's no danger of that so far as you are concerned," laughed Sammy Smiles; "so you are the one to go in, Hans."

"That's right! that's right!" shouted the boys, ready to have some sport with Hans, who was beginning to quake with apprehension. "You are the one to go in and dig Black Tom out. Go ahead now, and don't be all day about it!"

"Vell, I peen shot uf I do!" shouted the Dutch boy, taking to his heels and running at top speed down the old wood road, while the others of the party were convulsed with laughter.

It did not take Hans long to disappear, and Ephraim Gallup, who had been edging farther and farther from the hut, suddenly said:

"Gol derned if he's goin' to git away like that! I'll jest ketch him an' bring him back."

Then he started after Hans, and the way he handled his long legs added greatly to the merriment of the party.

When this merriment had subsided somewhat, it was resolved to make sure that Black Tom had really disappeared. Many strange tales had been told of the old hermit's astonishing doings, but the boys had never taken much stock in any of them. Frank Merriwell was decidedly skeptical about anything he could not understand, and he still thought it possible Black Tom was concealed somewhere about the hut.

Having selected three companions, Rains, Smiles and Gray, Frank entered the hut once more, with the trio at his heels.

The interior of the cabin looked the same as it had a

few minutes before, but nothing could be seen of the hermit and his dog.

There seemed to be no place of concealment, but the boys began a search, and they carried it out in a very thorough manner, looking into every corner that could have hidden a rat.

At last they were compelled to give up, baffled, and they stood looking at one another in utter bewilderment.

"The man and the dog must have left the hut at our very heels when we went out in the first place," said Frank. "We did not observe them, and they slipped away into the woods."

"That may be right," acknowledged Sammy Smiles, who was unusually sober for him, "but I think it is mightly queer not one of us saw them come out."

"So it is; but we must accept that as the only possible explanation. They could not have left by that window, for it is too small and too high. The door offers the only means of leaving the hut, and that must be the way they went."

"Well, I motion we leave it, and go on about our business," put in Ned Gray, who had grown decidedly nervous.

Frank led the way to the open air.

Outside another surprise awaited them.

Wat Snell had disappeared!

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SHORE OF THE LAKE.

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded Frank, holding himself in check with an effort. "How did he happen to get away?"

No one knew, it was said. While they had been discussing the surprising vanishing of Black Tom, Snell had found an opportunity to slip into the bushes and make good his escape.

Frank reprimanded them severely for carelessness.

"This is very unfortunate," he said. "Snell will lose no time in joining the rebels, and they will know just where we are. They will be on their guard."

The boys knew this was true, and they felt that they had been guilty of gross carelessness.

"We have already spent too much time here," declared Frank. "Snell must not get too much the start of us."

In a few seconds they were again moving briskly along the old wood road, leaving the hut of the strange hermit behind.

They had not proceeded far when a great commotion was heard in the bushes, and Ephraim Gallup appeared, dragging Hans Dunnerwurst, who was angrily protesting.

"Uf you don't let go uf mein person, I vill ged hurt!" cried Hans, threateningly.

"Come erlong!" roared Ephraim. "Yeou're the biggest scarecrow I ever saw!"

"Oh, you go fall mit yourseluf on!"

"Come erlong!"

"Uf you don'd leggo mein person, I peen goin' to hit you real hard!"

"Do it if you dast!"

Then Hans punched Ephraim in the pit of the stomach, doubling the Vermonter up like a jack knife.

"Ow-wow-wow!" howled the country boy, when he could catch his breath. "That warn't no fair! That was below the belt, gol ding ye!"

"Vell," grinned Hans, who thoroughly enjoyed the convulsions of the lank lad, "uf I don'd peen aple to reach up apove der pelt, you vill haf to oxcuse me."

"Say, you thunderin' Dutchman! d'ye know what I'm goin' to do to you fer this air?"

"Vell, I don'd oxpect I do."

"Well, by gum! I'm goin' to set on you, an' I'm goin' ter set so hard that when I git up there won't be northin' of you left but a grease-spot!"

Ephraim was preparing to go at Hans in earnest, but Frank Merriwell's voice checked further hostilities.

"You may quit that!" he cried. "We've got no time to waste in this way. Wait till we overtake the rebels, and then you may have all the scrapping you want. Fall in!"

They did not dare disobey, and so they fell in, and the little company continued its brisk march toward the lake.

They were not far from the lake, which was soon seen glittering through the trees.

Frank brought the company to a halt, not believing it best to march boldly out to the shore of the lake, as they might be seen by the deserters.

With Fred Davis as a companion, he went forward, leaving the boys stretched at ease on a mossy spot.

They proceeded cautiously, not knowing but they might come upon the deserters unexpectedly.

At length they came out to the lake, and there they

found the smoldering remains of a fire, and every evidence to show that the party they were after had camped there some time before.

It was not far from sunset, and Frank was not at all satisfied with their day's work, for he had expected to overtake and capture Reynolds and his companions that afternoon.

Carefully following up the trail left by the party, the boys found they had taken to the sandy beach, and had turned back toward the edge of the woods.

"They may have sought a camping spot on that point over there," said Frank. "It will be a good plan to reconnoiter."

"If we go along the beach, we may be seen."

"That's true, and so we will keep within the edge of the trees as far as possible. Come on."

Not wishing to waste any time, Frank advanced at a rapid pace, and Fred found it no easy thing to follow. As they approached the point, they halted frequently to listen. Knowing the point must give them a good view along the shore in both directions, Frank led the way out upon it.

Suddenly, from far away beyond the point, came a wild cheer of youthful voices, followed by the heavy report of a gun.

CHAPTER XXX.

CAPTURE OF THE BOAT.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Frank. "Those are the deserters, and they're up to something. Come on, Davis!"

He started at a run straight across the point, and Fred followed closely. They did not mind the bushes and underbrush, and they soon came out on the other side.

To Frank's surprise, they were not far from the edge of the forest, the old woodroad having led them back as it came down to the shore of the lake.

At no great distance lay Sailor Jack's schooner beside the floating pier. The mainsail was up, and it seemed evident that some one had been attempting to get the boat under way. The deck was swarming with lads in the cadet uniform of Fardale Academy.

But there was trouble on board the *Captain Kidd*, and a glance showed Frank that a struggle was going on.

"Those fellows are trying to get away on the schooner," cried Merriwell. "They must be stopped."

Along the beach he ran, and Davis still followed, wondering how in the world Frank was going to stop ten desperate and determined deserters from sailing away in the schooner.

That was something Frank could not have told himself, but he hoped to find some method of preventing the rebellious cadets from accomplishing their design.

"If they get away it may take a week to overhaul them and bring them back," he thought.

As the boys ran forward, they saw a man who was

battling desperately with the lads on the schooner, and he was easily recognized as the owner of the craft, Sailor Jack himself.

It had become apparent that he had discovered the boys in the act of appropriating his vessel, and had hastened to prevent the accomplishment of their design, if possible.

But the boys meant to sail away in the *Captain Kidd*, and, while several were struggling with Sailor Jack, others were casting off and pushing the schooner out from the pier.

The sailor proved himself a desperate fighter, for he flung the boys off as fast as they sprang upon him, and he struck some blows that sent them staggering.

Frank and Fred were seen running along the shore, and the deserters sent up a shout of defiance.

Frank had hoped to reach the schooner before it could swing out from the pier, but the light breeze caught the sail and the craft began to drift away.

That the boys knew little about handling such a vessel was apparent, as they had run up the mainsail first, when the jib or foresail should have been set to swing the head of the schooner.

Seeing Frank approaching, Reynolds was heard to order up every sail, and, with bungling haste, the deserters sought to obey his directions.

"Ten to one they beach her," thought Merriwell. "They will with her heading as she is now."

But the faint breeze blew directly off shore, so no one but the most bungling lubber was liable to beach the schooner. Her sails filled, and she swung away.

At about this time Bascomb and the fellows who had been struggling with the owner of the schooner, succeeded in knocking Jack down and stunning him.

"Over with him!" shouted Bascomb. "Let him swim ashore. We don't want to take him with us."

Then the man was lifted bodily and cast overboard.

It is a singular fact that few sailors are good swimmers, and it is doubtful if Sailor Jack ever knew how to swim. When cast into the water in the first place, he immediately sank from view, and he was beneath the surface some time.

When he came up, Jack tried to keep his head above water, but his desperate efforts to do so were baffling to his own hopes, and he went down a second time.

By this time Frank realized that the man could not swim, and was liable to drown.

The schooner had acquired considerable headway, and was at last pointing straight out into the lake. No one on board seemed to be paying much attention to the unfortunate sailor who had been cast overboard.

Out upon the floating pier dashed Frank Merriwell, stripping off his coat as he ran, and casting it aside. Not a single instant did he hesitate. Having noted the spot where Sailor Jack had disappeared, he plunged in and swam toward it.

Frank was in time to reach the drowning man as he came up for the last time. Jack had long hair, and the boy fastened his fingers in that, crying:

"Steady, now, and I will save you!"

But Jack was frantic, and without reason, like all drowning persons, and he tried to clutch his would-be rescuer.

Frank fought him off, but found the man so fierce that it was with no small difficulty he could be kept at a distance.

"Keep still!" he repeated, over and over. "Stop it, and I will get you out!"

At length, becoming exasperated, he lifted one clinched

hand out of the water and struck the old sailor a heavy blow on the temple.

That was enough to daze Jack, and Frank succeeded in swimming with him to the pier, where Fred Davis aided him in drawing the man out of the water. Together they carried him ashore.

It was not very long before the sailor began to come round, so Frank decided it was not necessary to labor over him.

In the meantime, the schooner was bearing the triumphant deserters away, and a wild chorus came from the lips of the reckless crew, growing fainter and fainter with the increasing distance:

"Oh! my name was Captain Kidd,
When I sailed, when I sailed;
And so wickedly I did,
When I sailed, when I sailed."

Frank was thoroughly disgusted with the result of the day's pursuit of the deserters. They had not been overtaken, and they were sailing away jubilantly, triumphantly.

Sailor Jack sat up and shook his fist after the schooner, gurgling in his throat:

"May I be keelhauled if I don't get even with ye, you lubbers! Steal my schooner, well ye? I'll pay you back in your own coin, and you may lay to that, my hearties!"

Then he looked at Frank and Fred in a dazed sort of way.

"Why ain't you with 'em?" he asked.

"We do not belong to that gang," replied Frank.

"But you are dressed like 'em."

"They are the party we are pursuing."

"The mutineers?"

"Yes."

"They threw me overboard, and I came near going to Davy Jones' locker."

"Rather."

"You pulled me out?"

"I did."

"Well, shiver my timbers if I forget it, mate! It's the first good turn any human being has done me in years, and I'll remember it. What's your name?"

"Frank Merriwell."

"Well, Frank Merriwell, give us your fin, and may you get your grog reg'lar till you take your last cruise to that country from which no sailor ever ships again. No, I won't forget that you done a good turn for Old Jack."

"I wish you might have taken the time and attention of those fellows two minutes longer," said Frank. "That would have given me time to reach the schooner."

"I done my best, mate. I was at the house when I first saw them around the *Kidd*. I took my old gun and made for her as fast as I could. They saw me coming, and tried to get her away; but they couldn't do it. I tried to scare the lubbers off with my gun, but shiver my timbers if they would go! Then I boarded her, and in the scrimmage the old gun went off. I fought them till they threw me over, and you know the rest."

"I wonder where they are going?" speculated Frank.

He wrung some of the water out of his clothes, and they watched the schooner till it swung round an island that lay about a mile away. She was not seen again, and Sailor Jack said it was evident the deserters intended to pass the night on the island.

"Is there no way of getting over to them to-night?" asked Frank. "If boats could be found to carry my company——"

"I can find ye two boats, mate, and they'll take five men each."

"Where are they?"

"Within a mile of here."

"Can you get them and bring them here within two hours?"

"Keelhaul me if I can't!"

"Do it, and I will pay you well."

"I don't want any pay, mate; but I'd like to get my vessel back."

"Well, I'll help you do that."

"Then I'll be on hand with the boats, and you may lay to that."

"And I'll be on hand with all the men they will carry," assured Frank. "Reynolds and his gang shall not pass a peaceful night on the island."

After a few more words, Frank and Fred left the old sailor, hastened back to join the boys who were still waiting in the woods.

The sun dropped down in the west, and darkness was coming on when Frank rejoined his command.

The boys were all eager to know where he had been, but he did not remain there while relating his adventure. Without delay he got the party in motion, and marched them back along the old woodroad, past the hut of the hermit, which seemed dark and deserted, and reached the highway through the forest.

During the march he told them what had happened, and gave his plan for following the deserters when they had taken supper at the old farmhouse.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ON THE ISLAND.

Two hours later the entire party was at Sailor Jack's floating pier. They found the sailor waiting for them with the boats.

Frank selected eight companions to accompany him, the sailor being the ninth. Barney, Hans and Ephraim were eager to go along, and Frank accepted them.

Hodge was placed in charge of one boat, and Frank took the other. Preparations were made for muffling the oars when they came near the island, and they pulled off from the pier.

For all that it was a decidedly dark night, Sailor Jack found no difficulty in piloting them over the lake directly toward the island.

By the time half the distance was made they could hear shouting and singing on the island, which made it evident that the deserters were enjoying themselves.

From the time that they first heard these sounds there was no difficulty in bearing straight toward the island.

It seemed quite unnecessary to muffle the oars, but Frank saw that the precaution was taken, and they slipped noiselessly up to the shore of the island.

Having secured the boats where it seemed certain they would remain safely concealed until wanted, Frank led the way toward the point from whence the singing and shouting came.

Passing through a thick growth of timber and bushes, they saw a campfire gleaming before them.

"They're in the old fort," whispered the sailor.

"What's the old fort?" asked Frank.

"It's a circular wall of stones on that little elevation, and nobody knows why she were built there or who built her."

"Well, fort or no fort, we're going to attempt the capture of that gang."

The deserters had built two large fires, the light of which revealed their surroundings plainly, and shone out on the water of a deep cove that made into the island on that side. The schooner lay in the cove, close to the shore, so close, in fact, that a long plank had been run from her deck to the top of a low bluff.

Frank's first move was to pass around the camp of the deserters, and get between them and the vessel.

It was easy enough to pass round the camp, but it was not so easy to cut them off from the schooner without being seen.

Believing Reynolds and his companions would be overwhelmed by a sudden attack, Frank made every arrangement, and, at a signal decided upon, the cadets gave the academy yell and charged.

But the deserters had prepared for such an emergency. They leaped up behind the low wall of the fort, and Reynolds was heard to shout:

"Stones, boys—stones! Give 't to 'em!"

Then a shower of stones flew at Frank and his party.

"Shimminy Gristmas!" howled Hans Dunnerwurst. "I vos kildt alretty yet! I vos hit der small uf der stomach as done mit! Ouch! Dunder and blitzens!"

"Shut up your tarnal towse!" cried Ephraim Gallup. "You make more fuss—— We-ow! My leg is broke! I can't step on it! Don't throw any more stones this way! I'll surrender!"

The first volley of stones served to check the rush

somewhat, but Frank, hit three times, kept to the front, shouting:

"Forward! Drive them out, and then we've got 'em! Come on, lads!"

"I'm with you!" assured Bart Hodge.

The words had barely left Bart's lips when he was struck in the head by a stone, and fell heavily to the ground.

Frank saw Bart go down, and he paused a moment. Then he realized that his party had turned and were taking to their heels.

An exclamation of anger came from Frank's lips, but he saw he could not check his demoralized company. The deserters had prepared to fight if they were followed, and the volleys of stones were too much for the attacking company.

Frank caught Bart up and, flinging his limp comrade over his shoulder, hurried away into the darkness beyond the reach of any stones that could be thrown from the fort.

Merriwell was thoroughly angered by the manner in which his comrades had fled before the shower of stones, but he held himself in check, believing in controlling and governing his temper.

However, when he found the cadets huddling in the darkness nursing various wounds, he expressed his amazement at the readiness with which they were repulsed.

But he was concerned over Bart, for an injury such as Hodge had received might prove serious.

In a few seconds, however, Bart showed signs of returning consciousness, and he finally struggled to a sitting posture, holding his head with his hands, and groaning.

"I beheld more fireworks than were ever seen at any

Fourth of July celebration," he declared. "Murder! how my head aches!"

When he found the deserters had beaten them off, he did not hesitate to express his feelings freely and forcibly.

Suddenly a cry of consternation came from the deserters, and the light of the fires showed Sailor Jack on board the schooner. The old salt had drawn in the plank, and was getting up the jib. That it was his intention to make sail and get away with the vessel as soon as possible became evident.

The deserters were thrown into a state of dismay, but Reynolds was heard to shout:

"Out, boys, out! Don't let him get off with the schooner! We are trapped if he does!"

Out of the fort came the deserters, some of them stumbling and falling in their haste to reach the *Captain Kidd*.

"Now is our time, lads!" said Frank, in a low, distinct tone. "Jack has pulled in the plank, and the schooner has swung off a little. They will not succeed in reaching her. Follow me, and we will take and hold the fort. That will turn the tables on those fellows, and force them to surrender."

For all of his aching head, Hodge was on his feet in a moment, and the other boys were eager to carry out Frank's plan.

Merriwell held them in check long enough to let the deserters get a considerable distance from the fort. Then came the low, sharp order:

"Forward! Follow me!"

They made a dash to cut off the deserters, and the movement was successful, not being discovered till they were nearly into the fort.

By that time the deserters saw they could not reach

the schooner, and they realized the tables had been turned on them.

"Back, lads—back to the fort!" cried Rupert, in consternation. "We'll have to fight for it, but we mustn't let those fellows hold it."

Into the fort leaped Frank, with his friends close behind him. His eyes fell on the little heaps of round stones that had been gathered for the purpose of defending the fort, and his voice rang out:

"Here's our ammunition, fellows! Beat 'em off, as they did us! Hurrah! We've got 'em!"

He set the example by catching up a stone in each hand and turning to send them whizzing at the charging foe.

The other lads were not slow to catch on, and now Reynolds and his crowd faced a volley that drove them back precipitately, and sent them scampering into the darkness.

The victors gave the academy yell, and gave it with a will.

The defeat of the deserters now seemed complete, for they had left provisions, guns and so forth, on board the schooner, and Merriwell had turned the tables on them.

"Vell," observed Hans Dunnerwurst, "uf dis don'd peen a recular war, alretty! You pet me your life I vos going to abbly vor a bension."

"It strikes me those fellows will have to surrender unconditionally," said Frank.

There was a lull of a few moments. It was impossible to tell what the enemy was doing, but Frank more than half expected Reynolds was making preparations to lead another charge on the fort.

But the minutes slipped away, and the charge did not come.

Frank began to grow uneasy. Finally he said:

"Seven can hold this fort as well as nine. Come on, Bart, let's go on a scouting expedition."

"I am with you," assured Hodge. "Lead the way."

Frank leaped over the wall of the fort and ran like a deer into the darkness, followed by Bart. Of course they were not sure they would not run straight into the clutches of the enemy, but they took their chances on it.

Nothing of the kind occurred.

As soon as they were concealed by the darkness, Frank halted and said:

"I have a feeling that something is wrong, Bart."

"Same here. Those fellows are altogether too still."

"We will soon find out. Come on."

Frank led the way, and it did not take them long to reach the shore where they had left the two boats.

But the boats were not there!

And far out on the bosom of the lake came the sound of working oars!

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE BURNING OF THE HUT.

"Tricked!" gasped Frank.

"Beaten!" palpitated Bart.

"Those fellows have found our boats and gotten away in them!"

"Sure!"

There was a moment of dismayed and disgusted silence, and then Frank slowly said:

"I was afraid of it. Sailor Jack is gone with the schooner, and we are beautifully trapped. Oh, but won't Reynolds and Bascomb chuckle in their sleeves! How they ever found those boats is a mystery; it must have been by sheer accident."

It was a bitter pill to swallow, but the only thing they could do was to make the best of it. To make sure they were not mistaken, they searched along the shore for the boats, but it was a waste of time. The boats were gone beyond a doubt.

Never in all his life had Frank felt more disgusted than he did at that moment. He had taken pains to conceal the boats, and the rebels had stumbled on them by pure blundering luck. A short time before it had seemed that the deserters were well overtaken and defeated in such a manner that they would soon be forced to surrender, but now——

"I hate to go back and tell the boys the truth," said Frank.

Bart groaned. He was fully as disgusted as Frank.

There was nothing to do but return to the fort and make the situation known, and this they proceeded to do. Frank braced up and assumed a careless air, laughing heartily as he told how they had been tricked.

"Great gosh all thutteration!" fluttered Ephraim Gallup. "You don't mean to say we are left here on this islan', an' we ain't got no way of gittin' ashore?"

"Oh, there is a way to get ashore all right," smiled Frank.

"Hoaw?"

"Swim."

"Shimminy Gristmas!" gurgled Hans. "Vot you dink we peen—vish?"

After a time the boys recovered sufficiently to laugh over the affair, which they were inclined to accept as a good joke on themselves, and let it go at that.

"The fellows we left on shore will get us off some way in the morning," assured Frank. "We can raise a signal of distress, and that will bring them over."

So they made preparations to spend the night on the island.

While they were thus engaged, an exclamation of surprise and relief came from Frank, who sprang up on a large stone, standing in the full light of the fires, and waving his cap about his head, while he cried:

"Schooner ahoy!"

The light of the fires showed them the *Captain Kidd* swinging round in the little cove, with Sailor Jack at the helm.

"Ay, ay, sir," called back the old tar. "What's happened on the island?"

"We're castaway — marooned — Robinson Crusoed," Frank replied. "Those deserters have escaped in our boats, and left us here."

The sailor was surprised, but he recognized Frank, and

he knew there could be no trick about it, so he brought the schooner into the deep water that allowed her to lay close to the bluff. Frank and Bart were on hand to catch the line that was cast ashore, and then the plank was run out, and the relieved and delighted boys walked aboard.

"I thought I would lay into the cove and see how things were going," said the old salt. "I didn't think of finding you in this scrape, my hearties."

Frank explained how it came about, using as few words as possible.

"It's a good thing for us you cruised round this way again," he said, in conclusion. "We were making preparations to spend the night on the island."

"Well, it'll take me some time to set you ashore," said Jack, "for I'll have to beat her up against the wind, which is not very strong. If it holds till we make the pier we'll be in luck."

The plank had been drawn in, and the boys pushed the *Captain Kidd* off with oars till some flaws of wind cut down into the cove and gave her start enough so she slowly worked her way out into open water, where there was a better breeze.

It was, indeed, a long, wearisome task of beating the schooner up against the wind, but Old Jack was sailor enough to take advantage of everything, and, two hours after leaving the island, they were beating past the edge of Ten-Mile Woods on their "last leg." Through an opening in the trees they caught a glimpse of a campfire, around which a party of lads were gathered.

"They must be Reynolds and his gang," said Frank. "I do not believe the fellows we left on shore would have come away over there to camp."

When the pier was reached, the rest of the party was found still waiting for them there, so it was settled be-

yond a doubt that the campers in the woods were the rebels they had come out to capture.

"It is quite probable they believe themselves safe, and they will not be expecting us," said Frank. "We must lose no time in falling on them."

In a very few minutes the entire company was marching briskly along the beach, determined to end the hunt as soon as possible.

Beyond the wooded point they came upon the boats, which had been drawn out upon the beach, and they soon saw the fire gleaming through the trees.

Frank proposed to creep up on the deserters and surround them, so they began stealing forward through the woods, making as little noise as possible.

Each cadet was now armed with a gun, to which a bayonet was set, and it was Frank's scheme to form a circle of steel about the rebels, so there could be no escape for any of them, unless they chose to rush straight upon a bayonet.

The campfire had died down, and an awesome silence reigned in the forest. The boys were forced to proceed very slowly, in order not to make noise enough to alarm the enemy.

In this way considerable time was spent in getting near enough to the fire to discover that there seemed to be no one in the vicinity. A fear that he had been fooled again came upon Frank, and he hastened on with less caution.

In a few moments the boys were gathered by the fire, looking inquiringly into each other's faces.

"Vere dey vos, ain'd id?" asked the puzzled Dutch lad. "Dey don'd peen here so much as dey vos yet avile, I pelief me."

"They are gone," said Frank, reluctantly, "but I do not believe they were warned of our coming in any way."

"Perhaps they were," said Bart. "It is possible they

had a spy watching the pier to see when the *Captain Kidd* arrived."

"It is possible," Merriwell admitted. "Perhaps they decided to get out of the woods. The old wood road is near, and they must have gone that way."

After a brief consultation with Bart, Frank decided to take the wood road and follow it to the main highway.

It was dark in the forest, but Frank seemed to have the eyes of an owl, for he led them to the road without difficulty, and they were soon tramping along in an irregular line.

"The saints defind us!" muttered Barney. "We've got to pass th' hut av th' ould hermit!"

"What's that ere light ahead there?" asked Ephraim Gallup. "It's gittin' brighter an' brighter. B'gosh! it looks like a fire!"

"It is a fire!" cried Frank, as the glaring light grew stronger. "It is a burning building, at that! It must be the hut of the hermit! Forward, boys, forward!"

Away they rushed, and in a very few moments they came out into the little opening where the hermit's hut stood. The wretched hovel was on fire, and the flames were breaking through the roof, lighting the surroundings.

As the boys broke into the opening, the light of the fire showed them that the deserters were collected near the hut, watching the fire, but making no attempt to extinguish it. Indeed, they were laughing and shouting for Black Tom to come out and show himself.

Frank and his company were right upon the deserters before they were detected. Then Frank shouted:

"Surrender! You cannot escape!"

Reynolds and Bascomb were astonished, for they fancied Frank was still on the island, from which he would not be likely to escape till morning. Their bewilder-

ment made it possible for Frank's party to cut them off on three sides, while the burning cabin hemmed them in on the fourth.

Bascomb wanted to fight, but the spirit seemed to go out of Reynolds in a twinkling, and he said:

"You've caught us fast this time, Merriwell. We'll have to surrender."

"You fool!" snarled Bascomb. "We can all get away! Come, make a break! Follow me!"

He dashed fiercely at the line, but the hard fist of Ephraim Gallup, propelled by the country boy's muscular arm, smote the bully on the jaw, and Bascomb went to the ground in a heap—knocked out!

"You don't want to run up ag'in that air bunch of bones, 'less ye like to hurt yerself!" grinned Ephraim. "One thump of that fist means sickness, an' one thump of this one means a job for the undertaker."

The manner in which Bascomb was disposed of instantly checked all disposition to rush, so far as the deserters were concerned, and it seemed that their capture was easily accomplished.

"What was the cause of this fire?" asked Frank.

"Oh, we thought we'd give the old hermit a housewarming," laughed Rupert Reynolds.

"What's that?" cried Frank, catching him by the arm. "What do you mean by that?"

Reynolds drew back a bit, muttering:

"You needn't crush a fellow's arm off!"

Frank shook him fiercely.

"What did you mean by your words?" he demanded, in a tone that made Reynolds shiver. "Do you mean to say you set that hut afire?"

"What if we did? We couldn't do a better thing for this section. Everybody is afraid of Black Tom, and the people would like to see him driven away."

"And so you set fire to the only home the poor old man has! That was a brave and manly thing to do! You should feel proud of yourselves!"

Rupert cowered before Merriwell's withering scorn. The laughter was gone from his face, and he choked with anger and fear, as Frank's eyes seemed to bore him through and through.

With an exclamation of disgust, Frank flung Rupert aside; but a second later he had the fellow by the arm again, as he swiftly asked:

"Where is Black Tom?"

"I don't know," was the sullen answer.

"Did you look for him?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"We called for him to come out of the hut."

"Well?"

"He did not answer."

"What then?"

"We went in to look for him."

"What did you find?"

"Nothing but his miserable dog."

"And so you set the hut afire! A fine thing to do!"

"Oh, the dog flew at us, snarling and snapping, and we took some brands from the fire and flung them at the creature. They set the hut afire. That's all there is to it."

"But you made no attempt to put the fire out, so you are responsible. It is an outrage for which you should be punished."

Reynolds hung his head, looked sullen, and said nothing.

Suddenly the boys were startled and electrified by hearing a wild cry that seemed to come from the heart of the burning hut.

"What was that?" asked Bart Hodge, breathlessly. "It sounded like a human cry of agony."

"But it wasn't," declared one of the deserters. "There was no human being in that old hut. It must have been Black Tom's dog. The creature——"

He was interrupted by another cry that was so weird and wild that it made the hair stand on the heads of the appalled boys.

"By heavens!" shouted Hodge, "that was no dog! It was a human cry of distress! There is a human being in there. The hermit—the old man is burning to death in that fire!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FRANK'S FATE.

The horrified lads seemed turned to stone. They stood and stared at the burning hut, appalled beyond measure.

The thought that a human being was perishing in that fire seemed to rob nearly every lad of strength and nerve.

"It must be the hermit!" rang out the voice of Frank. "It would be as bad as murder to leave him there! He must be saved!"

He started toward the hut, but Fred Davis caught hold of him, crying:

"No, no—it can't be done! Look! The hut is all afire! No one can go in there and come out alive!"

For the third time that wild shriek of agony came from the heart of the flames.

In the twinkling of an eye, Frank hurled Davis aside, and then he dashed straight at the fire-wreathed doorway of the old hut. The horror-stricken lads saw him bend his head and plunge straight into the hut, seeming to disappear beyond a curtain of fire.

Fred Davis staggered, and seemed on the point of fainting, as he gasped:

"That's the last of him! We'll never see anything of Frank Merriwell again till his bones are exhumed from the ashes!"

"I am afraid you're right," came hoarsely from the lips of Bart Hodge. "It does not seem possible for any human being to go in there and come out alive."

The boys waited and watched, while the seconds passed

and the flames infolded the entire hut. But Frank did not reappear, and hope soon turned to despair in the hearts of his comrades. In silence they stood around and watched the fire fiend complete his work. The roof of the hut fell in, sending up a great cloud of sparks, some of which must have set the woods afire, but for the fact that there had been several days of rain shortly before, so the forest was not in a dry state. The walls tumbled in, sending up more sparks, the fire died down, and the embers began to smoke.

All hope had long been dead, but still the boys lingered and stared into the embers, although they feared what might be discovered there.

One or two of the lads turned away to conceal their emotions, and some of the deserters began whispering among themselves. Bascomb had recovered in time to see Frank plunge into the burning hut, and he seemed the only one who was not affected.

"He's gone for good now!" the bully whispered to Reynolds. "Merriwell will never trouble us again."

Rupert drew back from Bascomb.

"Yes, he is gone," was his admission; "but I find very little satisfaction in that."

"Oh, what's the matter with you?" sneered the big fellow. "You make me sick!"

"And you make me disgusted!" returned Reynolds. "I feel like a murderer, for we started that fire."

"That's right," put in Wat Snell; "but we didn't know Merriwell was going to jump into it like a fool."

"He made a brave, though foolish, attempt to rescue the old man."

"Perhaps the hermit was not in that fire at all. You know it is said he has the power of appearing and disappearing at will. He may have made that cry seem to come from the flames for the very purpose of leading

some one to rush in. Maybe that was his scheme to get even with us for burning his hut."

"Boys," said Reynolds, "do you know we are in a pretty bad scrape?"

"How?"

"Why, this whole affair will count against us. We fired the hut, and so we brought about Merriwell's death."

"Rot!" broke in Bascomb. "Your blood is poor; you need a tonic."

"And you were the one who led us into this business, anyway," said Wat Snell. "You hired us to help get Bascomb out of the guard-tent, and——"

"I wish I had left him there!"

"And let me tell why I thumped you?"

"Yes!" flashed Rupert. "It would have been much better for me if I had let you blow the whole matter."

"You would have been dismissed for your little trick of squirting hartshorn into Merriwell's face during the hundred yards dash on field day."

"And you would have taken the same medicine for blackmail," Reynolds shot back. "You have blackmailed me ever since that time, and I have paid you more than two hundred dollars to keep still. When I refused to cough up seventy-five dollars all in a lump, and called you a blackmailer, you jumped on me and hammered me. That's the truth of the matter, boys, and I feel better now that I have let the whole thing out."

Reynolds was desperate and defiant, and he would not be checked, although Bascomb made several attempts to choke him off.

"Well, you've shown yourself up in good shape!" sneered the bully.

"Begobs, Oi think he has shown you up a great dale better, me b'y!" broke in Barney Mulloy, who had been listening. "It was Frank Merriwell thot knew th' thrick

all th' toime, an' nivver opened his mouth about it. Av Reynolds had jist mintioned how th' land layed, Merriwell would av put a shtopper on Bascomb's toong. Betwane yez ye hiv had a hand in th' murther av wan av th' bist b'ys thot ivver brathed, rest his saoul!"

Reynolds nodded.

"I believe it," he muttered, thickly. "I don't know that Merriwell ever did me a bad turn, and I have hated him and worked against him ever since he entered the academy. I feel like a cur, and——"

He broke down. Believing that he had been instrumental in bringing about Frank's death, he was overcome with self-repugnance and remorse. For the first time in his life, Reynolds began to realize that his own character was most despicable. When a lad perceives faults in himself, and is ashamed of himself on that account, there is hope for him.

Bascomb longed to give Reynolds another thumping, and once more he sneered:

"You make me sick!"

"You are likely to be a great deal more so before this matter is settled," said Bart Hodge, who had been overcome by the events of the last half-hour. "You are a fellow who is no good on earth, and Fardale Academy can well get along without you. One of Frank Merriwell's fingers was worth a thousand such creatures as you! Close your mouth! If you make a reply, I'll have you tied up to a tree, and flogged, as you wanted me flogged!"

Bascomb was cowed into silence, but his eyes told of the bitter rage within his soul.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

LAST WORDS WITH THE HERMIT.

It was a sorrowful party that carried the news of Frank Merriwell's fate back to Fardale Academy—news which produced unbounded horror and grief, and caused Professor Scotch to break down and weep like a child.

The humbled, trembling deserters went along quietly, quaking with fear, for they knew not what punishment might fall upon them, as their reckless rebellion had brought about the tragedy.

How happy they would have been could they have known Frank was not dead—was not seriously injured!

When Frank rushed into the burning cabin he was determined to save the old hermit, if he could find him. In his heart he felt that his rebellious comrades would be guilty of murder if Black Tom perished in the fire they had set.

The heat scorched his face and hands, but he held his breath, dashing straight into the cabin, going in blindly, as it were. He depended in a great measure on being guided to the old man by fate.

The smoke was dense inside the hut, and tongues of red-yellow flames reached out and tried to wind about him. He put out his hands like one gone blind, feeling here and there in his search for the man. Ten thousand fiery demons seemed to surround him and hem him in, and then——

It seemed that the world fell away beneath his feet. There was a great shock and a blank.

When Frank recovered consciousness he was lying in a dark, hot place, with a smell of smoke strong in his nostrils. The air was so heavy that he breathed with difficulty, and he groaned a bit when he made the first effort to move.

Then a hand came and touched his face—a bony, skinny hand—and a muffled voice said:

"So you are coming round. I thought you could not be hurt very bad."

It was the voice of Black Tom!

That voice brought everything back to him. He remembered the burning hut, the shrieks of agony, his mad rush to the rescue, and the fall and shock.

"But I am not burned to death," he mumbled. "It is hot here, and I smell smoke; but I am not burned."

"You may find your face and hands are scorched some, but that is all," said the voice of the hermit.

He put out his hand, and touched a wall of stone. It seemed that he could almost feel the darkness.

"Where am I?" he asked.

"You are safe from the fire."

"That is evident, but it does not answer my question. You are Black Tom, and you did not perish in the burning hut."

"For which I have no cause to thank your friends. They burned my home, and——"

"The ones who did that have never been very friendly to me, although it is true that they are fellow cadets."

"You had no hand in setting the fire?"

"I should say not!" returned Frank, indignantly. "I am not up to that kind of business!"

"I knew it. I read your character correctly in the first place."

Frank had struggled to a sitting posture. He placed

his back against the wall of stone, but the heat and smoke were stronger when he did so.

"We cannot be far from the fire," he said. "You have not answered my question. Where are we?"

"In the passage that leads to my cellar," replied the strange man.

"Well, that beats me! I didn't know you had any cellar; I thought the floor of your hut was the solid ground."

"So it seemed."

"But it was not built thus?"

"No. The hut was built years ago by an escaped convict, who lived here in the woods till he died. He made the cellar, and he constructed it for a place of concealment in case he should be pursued and cornered by the officers. Heavy timbers were used to roof over the cellar, and these timbers were covered with thin, flat rocks. Then the dirt was placed on the rocks, and made to a level with the ground outside the hut. This made it seem that there was no cellar, and that the hut was built on the solid ground."

Frank Merriwell felt that he was dreaming. It was like an extract from some marvelous story, and he pinched himself to make sure that he was truly awake.

"In order to have means of getting into the cellar," continued the harsh voice of the hermit, "he left an opening up through. This he covered with a large, flat stone, which he worked on hinges, like a trap-door. This stone was immediately in front of the fireplace, and seemed like a hearth. Below the stone he placed a ladder that ran straight down into the cellar. Any one in the cellar could fasten the stone so it could not be lifted without the aid of levers, if some one above should take a notion to see if there was something worth looking at beneath it."

"That fellow was a genius," commented Frank.

"He was resolved not to be caught and penned in the cellar," the strange man went on, "and so he excavated a passage from the cellar to the heart of a thick mass of shrubbery a short distance from the hut. We are in that passage now."

"All this is quite astonishing," admitted Frank; "but how do I happen to be here?"

"Shortly before my home was set afire," continued the harsh voice of the hermit, "I heard cries outside. A crowd was calling for me to come out. I have seen such mobs. I nursed the man who built this hut; I was with him when he died, and I buried him here in the woods. He told me the secret of the cellar and the passage, and I have lived here since. But many times people have come in mobs to drive me away. They hate me, and they will not let me live in peace. Some of them said I was the escaped convict. I heard them shouting outside to-night, and I quickly descended into the cellar."

"I fancy that cellar has enabled you to appear in a manner that was most baffling and mysterious."

"It has mystified not a few people, but it will never aid me more, for, with the coming of another day, Black Tom will move on once more. The people about here will be satisfied, as they will succeed at last in driving me away. Where I may go I know not, but I am afraid to stay here longer.

"As I said, I descended into the cellar, and there I remained till I fancied my enemies must be gone. Then I lifted the trap and made the terrible discovery that my home was burning. I cried out in anguish—I called to my dog. Then I saw you come rushing blindly through the smoke, with the glare of the fire yellow on your face, and I recognized you."

"I heard your cries; I sought to save you."

"I knew that must be it. You were blinded by the smoke, and you staggered directly over the opening. I barely had time to get out of the way, when you plunged into the cellar."

"That was when it seemed that everything fell out from beneath my feet."

"My dog came, I saw my home was doomed, and I closed down the trap. Then, the heat growing strong, I dragged you into the passage, where we are at this moment."

"And the rest of the boys must think I met my fate in the burning hut. They must believe me dead."

"Fate has something far better in store for you than such a death."

"I am glad to hear it," said Frank, with a grim smile in the dark.

"After this night, it is not probable that you will ever again look on the face of Black Tom; but you will not forget him?"

"I am not likely to, and I shall not forget that some fellows who wear uniforms like my own burned his home. It is a shame! To-morrow—or to-day, if midnight is past, and it must be—I will do my best to raise a fund among the students at Fardale Academy, enough to enable you to rebuild your cabin. I will keep secret the truth concerning this cellar, and you may continue to live here in peace."

"No," was the sad return; "it is ordained that I shall remain here no longer. I appreciate your kindness, but Ten-Mile Woods will know Black Tom no more."

It was useless for Frank to talk of it; he had made up his mind, and nothing could change it. He refused to wait till money was collected to pay him for the destruction of his home.

"Come," said Frank, when he felt that his strength

was greatly restored, "lead the way to the open air. The air is foul in here, and I cannot stand it longer."

"We will go forth if your companions have departed," said the hermit. "All I ask is that they be punished for a little time by supposing you have been destroyed in the fire."

They crept along the narrow passage, Frank finding it necessary to crouch low, and finally came to some rude stone steps, which led up into the heart of a tangled mass of bushes and small trees. Frank drew in long breaths of the cool night air, and was very thankful for his escape from death.

Of the hut nothing but a glowing mass of embers remained, and the cadets had departed.

At parting but few words passed between the boy and the strange man, whose dog had followed them from the secret cellar. Black Tom bade him go, and he left the man standing in the reddish glow of his ruined home. Before passing from view along the wood road, he looked back. The hermit was darkly outlined against the light of the dying embers. The dog was crouching at his heels.

That was the last Frank ever saw of Black Tom.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE HANDS OF FRIENDS.

As he thought about the hermit's strange story, Frank came to the belief that Black Tom was the escaped convict, although the old man had stated the convict was dead.

On his way to camp he soon found himself passing the home of Sailor Jack.

He wondered if the old sailor were still watching on board the *Captain Kidd*, or if he had come home and gone to bed.

Frank felt a strong desire to know about this, and, almost before he was aware that he had left the road, he was close to the house. He paused, wondering what had brought him there.

"I'm afraid it wouldn't be very healthy for any one to be rapping around this place at this time of night," he thought. "Jack might come out with his old gun and do some shooting."

Glancing round the corner, Frank fancied he saw a gleam of light that came from a window near the back of the house. This aroused his curiosity, and he cautiously and silently made his way round to the window.

He was not mistaken. There was a curtain at the window, but a lower corner was torn away, and a light shone out.

In a moment Frank was peering into the room.

What he saw made him gasp with astonishment and incredulity.

"Am I dreaming?" flashed through his brain. "I must be! This is not really happening!"

He found himself looking into a wretched room, where, on the floor, lay Sailor Jack, securely bound and gagged. There were two other men in the room, and their faces were hidden by black masks.

One of the men was heating an iron poker in the open fire. The other was talking to the old sailor, and the boy outside could understand his words.

"We know ye've got a heap of money stowed away somewhere, me covie, an' we're goin' ter have it—see! We know ye found a buried pirate's treasure, an' we're goin' ter make yer cough it up. We mean biz, an' we're bad men ter monkey wid. Me pal is heatin' der iron ter warm up yer foot wid, an' we'll have yer boodle if we have ter burn yer leg off, inch by inch, clean ter yer body. Yer might as well cough before we begin. If ye'll give up der swag, wink yer right eye; if yer won't wink yer left eye."

The man looked into Jack's face, and then he cried:

"Left she is! Bring on der poker, pal."

He jerked off the sailor's boot and stocking, and the other man approached with a red-hot iron.

A groan came from behind the gag in the sailor's mouth.

Shuddering with horror, Frank turned away.

"The monsters!" thought the boy.. "I don't purpose to see that man tortured and robbed! What can I do?"

He sought for a heavy club that would serve as a weapon of assault, and in a few seconds he found what he desired.

Then he came back to the window, and looked in again.

The old sailor was writhing with pain, and one of the men was heating the poker again.

Evidently the wretches had applied the iron once.

"Dat's a taste," said the man who had spoken before. "Next time we'll give yer a lunch, an' dat'll be follered by a square meal. Don't be a fool! We're tender-hearted as chickens, an' we don't want ter hurt yer 'less ye make us. Just tell where der boodle is hid, an' we won't burn yer no more. Wot d'yer say?"

Sailor Jack shook his head.

"Come on wid der tickler, pal!" cried the spokesman.

The man with the poker took it from the fire, and again approached the helpless cripple.

Frank decided that the time for action had come. With a single blow of the club he held he shattered the window, smashing in sash, glass, and all.

Like a flash, the young athlete leaped through the opening he had thus made, and was within the room.

The masked men had started to escape, not knowing but a large number of assailants were right upon them.

Before they could get out of the room, Frank brought the club down on the head of one of them, knocking him senseless.

Then the boy caught the other fellow by the collar and flung him back into the room, crying:

"You shall not get away, you villain!"

The man staggered, retained his balance with some difficulty, and then, seeing Frank was followed by no others, whipped out a wicked-looking knife.

The boy sprang aside, and down came the club once more. The ruffian threw up one arm to shield his head, but it dropped, broken, at his side, and he was sent reeling. Before he could recover, the brave boy stretched him senseless beside his pal.

"Hurrah!" shouted Frank, as he caught up the ruffian's knife and hastened to set Sailor Jack free. "That was the way to cook 'em!"

The sailor sat up, working his jaws to get the cramp out of them. When he could speak, he said:

"Shiver my timbers if I ever saw anything like that! Boy, you're a wonder—a cyclone, tornado, simoom! Do you know what you've done? I believe these two lubbers are One-Thumb Harris and Slippery Goggs, two professional burglars, for whose capture there's a reward of three hundred dollars each offered, keelhaul me if I don't! You'll get the reward if I'm right, and I won't forget you myself. You may lay to that, my lad."

* * * * * * * *

The old sailor was right; the captured ruffians proved to be the burglars for whom the rewards were offered, and in due course of time the money came into Frank's hands.

Both Frank and Sailor Jack were interviewed by numerous newspaper reporters, and the story of the boy's daring single-handed attack upon and capture of the ruffians who were torturing the sailor was published broadcast, scores of papers containing Frank's picture.

The astonishment and unutterable joy created by Frank's safe return to the academy may be much better imagined than described. He was hailed as one risen from the dead, the encampment went mad with joy, his hand was nearly shaken off, he was hugged, he was lifted on strong shoulders and borne round and round the camp, followed by every cadet of the academy, all of them laughing, shouting, cheering, and singing. The band quickly assembled and headed the procession, a salute was fired from the artillery in use at the school, and Professor Gunn made a speech, filled with thanksgiving and praise for Frank. Little Professor Scotch tried to say something, but he broke down and embraced

Frank, while the tears of joy ran down his face, and another wild cyclone of cheers went up from the cadets.

Such a scene had never before been witnessed at Fardale. No outside spectator could have dreamed Frank Merriwell had ever found a foe amid that rejoicing throng.

The deserters were severely punished in the way of demerit and extra duties, with curtailed privileges, but none of them was dismissed.

Three weeks later Sailor Jack was attacked by a sudden and severe illness, of which he died in three days. He sent for Frank before the end, and, putting a paper into the boy's hand, said:

"They say I'm goin' to ship for a long voyage, my lad. I can't take my money along. You're the only person who's showed any kindness to me of late, and keelhaul me if I don't leave every cent of my money to you! It's an old pirate's treasure I located and dug up on Long Island. Just what it amounts to, I don't rightly know. That paper's my will, and I've had it fixed right by a lawyer. Here's another paper that tells where to find the money. I intended to die without ever tellin' anybody where it was hid, but I feel better that I've found somebody that's worth havin' it, and you may lay to that."

So the old sailor died, and Frank was chief mourner at the funeral. The treasure was found where it was hidden, and, when its value was ascertained, Frank Merriwell was known to be worth over forty thousand dollars.

"I congratulate you!" said Bart. "You deserve it. But what will you do with the pile?"

"I'll put it in the bank for the present," returned Frank. "Some day, perhaps, I'll find good use for it."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

GO AHEAD!

One day the cadets were discussing a recent close and exciting football game with the eleven from a rival academy.

"I tell you what, fellows," said jolly little Sammy Smiles, who had won glory as quarter-back, "those Irvington fellows had us fairly blocked twenty seconds before Merriwell made the touchdown that settled the game."

"That's right," nodded Bart Hodge. "I couldn't see a ghost of a show for us. It looked to me as if our attempt to break through their center would be a pitiful failure. And so it would have been if Merriwell hadn't shouted 'Go ahead!' at just the right moment."

"Begobs, thot's roight!" agreed Barney Mulloy. "When he shouted thot it put new loife into us, an' we broke through their loine loike they wur babies."

"It was those two words that won the day for Fardale," asserted Paul Rains. "I believe they put ginger into every one of us."

Frank laughed.

"In that case," he declared, "I am going to take them for a motto—for a war cry."

"Yah," said Hans Dunnerwust, "dot peen a goot vawgry. Ven you say dot, I peen retty to sdant your pack py und seen you do him. Dot vos der kindt uf a hairbin I peen, py shimminy!"

"Oh, why don't yeou learn ter talk the American lan-

guage!" exclaimed Ephraim Gallup. "The way yeou murder good United States makes me sick, b'gosh!"

"You go fall yourseluf der earth off!" hotly retorted Hans. "You peen too fresh alretty yet!"

"Break away!" laughed Frank, interposing between them. "Here comes Lieutenant Gordan, and you'll both find yourselves in the guard tent if you're not careful."

The approach of the lieutenant caused the group to break up. Frank and Bart Hodge strolled away together.

"What makes you so silent and downcast, Bart?" asked Frank. "You should be in a jolly mood after our victory, which, as our first football game this year, certainly promises well for this fall."

"I was not thinking of that," said Bart. "Somehow, I have a premonition of coming trouble for you, Frank. I believe we are soon to lose you here at Fardale, and that is enough to make me feel bad, for you have been my guiding star during the past year. I feel that I am quite a different fellow from what I was when I became a cadet at this academy, and it has come about from your generosity, your example, your influence. I was cordially disliked at first by the fellows here; but now, as your particular chum and tentmate, I have acquired friends and some popularity. If anything should happen to take you away, I am afraid I'll drift back into my old habits and fall in with my former associates."

"Nonsense, Bart! You are morbid; your liver does not act properly. You need a tonic. You are not naturally a bad sort of fellow; in fact, you are naturally square, upright, and honest. You despise meanness, and you hate a sneak. Why should you take up with crooked chums and sneaks? No, Bart, I have faith in you; you will never return to your old associates and your old ways."

Hodge grasped Frank's hand, a look of intense gratitude on his face.

"I won't forget those words, old man!" he said, with deep feeling. "Your faith in me will serve to keep me straight. If I am tempted to do a mean thing, I'll think that you believed in me, and that will hold me in check. I believe the year we have been together will have a vast influence on all my future life. If we could remain companions and comrades to the end of the regular Fardale term——"

"Well, I see no reason why we cannot. What is there liable to happen to take me from Fardale?"

"That I don't know, but I have not forgotten the words of the old hermit, nor that dream you told me you had that some one near and dear to you would soon die and leave you money, and that you would travel the whole world over. This could not have meant Sailor Jack, for the sailor was not near and dear to you."

"You are conjuring up something from nothing, Bart. It cannot be that you believe that dreams foretell what is before another——"

"Yes, I do. I have heard of many cases where people have dreamed many things that came to be true, visions that were fulfilled within a few hours."

"But there is no reason why you should think I am soon to leave Fardale."

"No reason, but an inward warning of what is to come."

Frank's merry laugh rang out.

"I tell you your liver is out of order, Bart. Take a tonic. I am too well satisfied with my life at Fardale to want to tear myself away very soon."

But these words did not dispel the feeling that had seized on the dark-faced lad.

The last days of the summer encampment had arrived;

before long the white tents would disappear, and the boys would return to barracks and long hours of study. Their faces were browned by the long weeks spent mainly in the open air. They were all erect, soldierly-appearing lads, the plebes bearing themselves much like the older cadets.

Frank had won his chevrons in the first year, but, far better, he had won the highest regard and esteem of his companions. Although he loved sport and often indulged in practical jokes, he was such a square, manly fellow that nothing he did seemed to retard his advancement, and he was respected by Lieutenant Gordan and the professors quite as much as by his fellow-cadets.

When Frank and Bart separated, the latter strolled to where he could gaze out over the cove to the open sea. The air was heavy and raw, and a moaning came from far out over the heavily-rolling waves, the seething and swishing of which he could hear. Tiger Tooth Ledge, away in the offing, was covered with a white crest, where the waves hove over it.

There was a storm in the air; Bart could feel it distinctly, and it seemed to make his spirits sink still lower. There was ever something about the sea that depressed him, and he turned away with a shudder.

That night, before they retired, Frank tried to rally Bart again, but with as little success as before.

"Hear the wind moan," said Bart, shrugging his shoulders. "Hear the sea roar. It is going to be a wild night."

"Well, everything is battened down close, and the tent-fly is drawn tight. What if the wind does howl and the rain come down? What do we care?"

"It may be the last night for more than one poor sailor."

"That's true; but we can't do them any good by getting blue over it. Brace up, Bart—brace up!"

When taps sounded the rain had begun to fall, and the sea was thundering from Black Bluff and Tiger Tooth Ledge.

The roar of the sea was music in Frank Merriwell's ears, and he quickly fell asleep, thankful he was not on sentry duty.

Bart found it impossible to sleep thus easily. For him the roaring of the sea was full of terrors. It reminded him of a ravenous beast howling for human flesh and blood to appease its hunger.

At length he slept, but it was to dream and to seem to hear above the roar of the sea the shrieks of drowning sailors.

Boom!

The sullen sound, heard above the roar of the storm, heard through his dreams, awoke Bart.

What was it? What had he heard?

Boom!

There it was again, and it came from out at sea.

It was a signal gun—the signal of a ship in distress!

As Bart leaped out of bed, the sound of a bugle and roll of a drum could be heard for all of the howling storm. It was the signal for the cadets to turn out, and it brought Frank Merriwell out of bed and onto his feet in a moment.

"What's up, Bart?" asked Frank, as he began to hustle into his clothes.

"There's a vessel in distress outside the cove. She's fired a signal once or twice."

"Merry jingoes! that's bad. The wind is driving straight into the cove, and Tiger Tooth lies at the entrance."

"Sure. It's strange, but I had a feeling last night

that something of this kind was going to happen, although I did not speak of it. Now will you say there is nothing in premonitions?"

Frank did not answer this question. He was too much in a hurry to spend time in further words.

In a very few seconds both lads were dressed, with rubber coats outside their other clothing, prepared for a plunge into the storm. Although he had been first out of bed, Bart was not first to open the buttoned front of the tent and spring out into the wild night.

Lads were rushing out from the other tents, ready to form on the parade ground; but the word went round that time would not be lost in such a manner. They had been called out to render assistance to the distressed vessel if possible, and it would be folly to waste time in calling the roll.

Away went the boys toward the cove, beaten and buffeted by the wind and rain, filled with wild excitement, calling to each other, but having their voices drowned in the roar of the storm.

Boom!

Again the signal gun sounded through the night.

Frank had been looking seaward, and he saw the flash.

"She is right upon Tiger Tooth!" he thought. "In a few moments, at most, she will strike! God pity the souls on board of her!"

Many of the boys stopped when they reached a locality that commanded in the daytime a full view of the cove and the open sea beyond. They stood there, straining their eyes into the darkness, watching and waiting.

Frank found Bart Hodge was still at his side.

"She is close on Tiger Tooth!" he shouted. "I saw the flash of her gun."

"So did I," returned Bart. "She will strike in a minute."

"The life-saving station is two miles away. The guard can't get here in time."

"There's not much chance of it."

"See! There goes a rocket! She's close in the foam that is heaving over the ledge! Can't we do anything for her?"

A number of boys had gathered close around them, and they heard Frank reply:

"We can try. There are boats at the old boathouse, and there is plenty of rope there."

"But we can't launch a boat in the teeth of this storm!" cried Paul Rains. "Such an attempt would be madness!"

"Oi dunno about thot," Barney Mulloy was heard to declare. "As Frankie said, we can troy."

"That's right!" shouted Frank Merriwell; "and we will try! Away for the boathouse! Go ahead!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

BOY LIFE-SAVERS.

"Go ahead!"

The boys caught up Frank's cry, and above the roaring of the storm sounded a cheer that came from their lips. Then away they went toward the old boathouse, led by Frank.

The rain dashed upon them, the wind buffeted them, the treacherous ground sometimes sent them slipping, but they held on after their swift-footed, never-faltering leader.

Somehow, they felt that Frank would be able to do something for the imperiled ones on board the unfortunate ship. They had amazing confidence in this lad who was leading them.

From out of the fearful night of darkness and storm came a wild wail, faint and almost drowned by other sounds, but human and horrid in its intense terror and agony.

It was not the shrieking of the storm. It held a different note; it seemed to come from the throats of human beings.

"The vessel has struck!" shouted Frank, without slackening his steps.

They felt that he was right, and yet it did not seem possible that any sound from the lips of human beings could be carried such a distance through that fearful night. It was as if the demons of the sea and the storm had shrieked in chorus.

The waves were piling high along the beach, for the sea ran straight and fair into the cove. The boys kept at a distance, following Frank, who tried to urge them on now and then, although few of his words could be understood.

Before long they came to a point where the old boathouse could be seen by the light of day.

A shout broke from the boys.

Some one was at the boathouse.

The door of the house on the side opposite that exposed to the fury of the storm was open, and it was seen that there was a light in the house.

Glimpses of human beings were obtained.

Outside the boathouse a lantern was moving about.

"The coast guard are there!" some one cried.

But Frank did not stop. His voice was heard urging them on, although his words were not plainly understood.

Away into the air sailed another rocket, and it showed that the doomed vessel had really struck and was hanging on Tiger Tooth Ledge.

She could not last long, and so what was done for her must be done without delay.

Down to the boathouse ran the cadets.

When they arrived there, they were surprised to find the coast guard was not on hand.

Two fishermen and several farmers were there, and, with praiseworthy courage, they were laboring to launch a boat.

They had prepared to carry off the end of a line, which was to be let out by one who should remain on shore.

At the same time two men were working to start a bonfire, having brought a pile of dry wood from the boathouse. With the aid of pine knots, they finally succeeded, and the wind caused the fire to burn up briskly,

for all of the heavy rain. There was plenty of wood near at hand, and this was brought and thrown upon the pile till a roaring flame was flinging its light far out on the boiling, swirling, seething waters of the cave.

By the light of this fire the men worked to launch the boat, which was plainly a herculean task.

The boys were ready enough to help, but one of the men roughly shouted for them to get out of the way.

"What do you young cubs know?" roared the man. "Git out!"

The two fishermen knew their business well enough, but the farmers were of little use, although they were required to man the boat, and they evidently thought they would prove of great value in the work.

Twice did they attempt to turn the boat off from the shore, but, not working in unison, they were stopped by the fishermen, who used some decidedly violent language.

In the third attempt the boat was run off, but the men clambered in so awkwardly that it was caught up by the following large wave and tossed far up on the beach, being overturned.

The fisherman who had so roughly ordered the boys away was caught by the wave and sucked toward deep water, struggling desperately to save himself.

His companions saw his peril, but they were intent on saving themselves, or they seemed bewildered by the manner in which the water had clutched the boat and flung it ashore.

The great wave finally relinquished its clutch on the fisherman, but it left him lying helpless on the wet sand, where the next roller must break over him and complete his destruction.

Down the beach leaped Frank Merriwell, reaching the fisherman's side. The man was trying to struggle to his

feet, the flaring light of the fire showing a look of horror on his face.

The firelight also showed another wave, rolling brown and green right upon them, with a curling crest of foam that made it seem like some fearful monster with wide open jaws and gleaming teeth.

The fisherman shrieked his terror, slipped, and fell prostrate.

Then, with strength that astounded those who saw the act, Frank caught the man up, flung him over one shoulder, and leaped up the beach.

But he could not escape the monster wave that was hovering over him.

"He's lost! They're both gone!" shouted Paul Rains.

"Form a line!" screamed Bart Hodge. "Quick!"

Without waiting to see if the order were obeyed, he ran straight down to Frank, whose outstretched hand he grasped.

The boys seemed to catch the idea in an instant. Barney Mulloy was at Bart's heels, and he grasped Bart's hand. Rains was next, and he caught Barney by the hand, after whom came Ned Gray, Harvey Dare, Sammy Smiles, Ephraim Gallup, Hans Dunnerwust, and Sam Winslow.

This line formed in the twinkling of an eye, and it was barely in time, for the wave broke over Frank and the man he had risked his life to save.

Frank was hurled flat, but he clung to the man, who held fast to him.

Then came the receding of the wave, and the terrible suction that threatened to break the line and sweep some of the brave boys out to sea.

They clung fast with all their strength, and the line was not broken.

As soon as possible, Frank got upon his feet, helping the fisherman to rise.

"Go ahead!"

The words came like the blast of a bugle. They seemed to give the human life-line a united impulse, and away up the beach it went, dragging the fisherman from his peril and saving his life.

He was dazed and overcome, but the other fisherman, who had watched it all, rushed up and shouted:

"Ye work like old stagers, lads! That was one of the quickest and slickest pieces of work I ever saw done."

"The boat!" shouted Frank. "Did you save it?"

"Yes; them farmers dragged it up out of the way; but they're no good. We can't do anything. She can't be launched in the face of this sea."

"She can and shall!" were the words hurled from Merriwell's lips.

"Hurrah!" shouted the boys.

"Fellow," cried Frank, "you've seen these men make a failure. Are you ready to try the trick with me?"

"We are!"

"That's what I want to hear. It will take five of us to handle the boat. Mulloy, Rains, Hodge, and Dare are the ones I want. The others must help us get off and must pay the rope out to us."

"Ye're crazy!" roared the fisherman. "What do you boys know about launchin' a boat in the teeth of a heavy sea?"

"We've practiced it for sport, and now we're going to try to see what we can do in case of an emergency," returned Frank. "Come on, lads!"

He ran toward the spot where the boat had been dragged, and the cadets followed him closely, the blood throbbing through their veins, their hearts beating high with a noble and daring resolution.

The men had dragged the boat beyond reach of the heaving waves, and it was plain they had been so scared by the failure of the first attempt to launch her that there was no intention of making another trial.

They looked in wonder at the boys, and one of them rushed up to Frank, demanding:

"What are you going to do?"

"Launch this boat! Stand aside!"

"Ye can't do it!"

"Stand aside!"

"It's madness—it can't be done! We're not goin' to see ye throw yer lives away!"

The cadets from the academy were now flocking in large numbers to the vicinity, and Frank turned to them, shouting:

"Take this man away!"

The man had clutched the boat, but he was grasped by willing hands and twitched away in a fashion that robbed him of his breath.

"Ready, lads!" came from Frank's lips. "Right her, three on that side, three on this. I will go in stern. Get your places. Run her down a little. The waves do not beat this far, and we want every inch we can have."

They obeyed him in everything, and the boat was carried down till it lay where the highest waves rushed up and swished around it.

At this moment, a small man came bursting through the throng of excited cadets, and hurried to the side of Frank Merriwell, whose arm he clutched, hoarsely crying:

"What are you thinking of, Merriwell? It would be a sacrifice of you all! You could not escape being drowned! I forbid you to make the mad attempt!"

"Stand back, Professor Scotch!" shouted Frank. "The lives of human beings on board that vessel are in peril!

I believe we can launch this boat for all the wind and waves, and we are going to attempt it!"

"But I have authority over you, and I command you to desist."

"In a case like this we do not recognize your authority. Look out, professor—here comes a big wave, and it may suck you down."

With ludicrous agility, the little professor fled toward a place of safety.

"Stand ready!" rang out Frank Merriwell's voice.

Every oar was in its place, ready for the hands of the lad who was to wield it.

On came the great wave, curling over, breaking, running far up the beach on all sides of the six lads about the boat.

"Now!" shouted Frank. "Go ahead!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

'GAINST WIND AND WAVE.

As the wave receded they ran with it, bearing the boat between them till they were in deep water.

"In boys!"

As if controlled by one impulse and one set of muscles, they leaped into the boat, to the stern of which the light line had been attached. Frank took his place at the helm.

"Out oars!"

Into the rowlocks dropped the oars.

"Pull away!"

With all the strength of their muscular young arms and bodies, they bent to the oars, sending the boat to meet the next great wave, which was bearing down upon them, revealed by the light of the fire.

Every one of them knew it was sure to be a fierce battle, and they were prepared to strain every nerve. Thus far they had been wonderfully successful, and they might be able to reach the vessel if they could keep the next great roller from flinging them far up on the wave-washed beach.

Frank's hands on the helm held the bow of the boat straight on against wind and waves, and his voice rang through the storm as the great comber with its curling crest of green, topped with foam, lunged upon them.

"Pull hard!"

They laid to the oars with all the power they could command.

The boat was caught up like a cork, and for a moment

it was carried swiftly shoreward, for all of the heroic struggles made by the young life-savers.

Then came a moment when they held their own.

"Go ahead!"

Forward leaped the boat, and away they drove into the teeth of the hurricane, ready to meet the next wave and renew the battle.

They were determined, they had resolved to perish in the struggle, if need be, but to give up, never!

For several minutes they fought hard to get off from the shore, so the danger of being hurled upon the beach would be over, and the boat seemed to creep like a snail up against the wind, losing ground with each great wave, but recovering and gaining a little more before the next one came.

The sea seemed to boil and foam like a pot, and the wind tore off the caps of the waves and flung great sheets of spray clean over the boat.

For all of their storm garments, the boys were soon wet to the bone; but they did not heed that at all—they did not know it. The desperate struggle they were making kept the blood coursing freely in their veins and prevented them from being cold.

But for Frank's iron hand on the tiller, but for his readiness in meeting the shock of some gigantic wave that sought to hurl them sidelong, but for his encouraging cries, they must have been capsized a dozen times before they had rowed as many rods from the boathouse.

Somehow, Merriwell gave them confidence in themselves, such as they could not have felt if some one else had been at the helm.

The wind that shrieked down across the raging sea made the water swirl and hiss like ten thousand serpents. It seemed as if all the fiends of darkness and of the sea

were aroused to ungovernable fury, and were seeking the destruction of everything they could reach.

Afar out on Tiger Tooth Ledge lay the doomed vessel, and now a bright light told where she was beating herself to destruction on the reef. That light served as a beacon for Frank.

On shore the awed and admiring cadets watched the brave and desperate struggle of the six young life-savers, expecting each moment to see the boat capsized.

A score of times great waves seemed to sweep clean over the boat and swamp it. Each time a universal groan came from the excited, palpitating lads being carried away in the clutch of the wind, which howled in fiendish glee.

Each time the baffled wave tore on, and the boat fought through it, with the six lads still stubbornly continuing the battle. Each time a wild cheer went up from the watching crowd on shore, but the sound of this cheering did not reach Merriwell and his comrades.

In case the boat should upset, the cadets were prepared to form a human life-line, which should plunge into the surf and do its best in the work of rescuing.

One of the old fishermen was paying out the cord, and fifty times he muttered to himself:

"They may do it! It's remarkable, blowed if it ain't!"

Further and further from shore crept the boat, till at length the light of the fire on the beach scarcely reached far enough to show the black hulk tossed on the waters.

Finally the boat passed from sight, and was swallowed in the blackness of the storm-swept cove.

Many of those on shore wondered if they should ever again look on the living faces of the six brave boys who had gone to the rescue of those on the imperiled vessel.

The lads in the boat had begun to fear that they would

fail for all of their success at the outset, for strength and energy seemed going from them.

Being determined to hold out as long as possible, they kept at the work, although it seemed that they did not gain an inch for a long time.

Then came their "second wind," and, with renewed energy and determination, they bent to the task.

The light on the vessel guided them. No longer did the signal gun boom its appeal for aid over the wind-swept billows, although a rocket went up now and then.

Frank feared the vessel would be beaten to pieces on the ledge long before she could be reached. That she had lasted so long was surprising to him, and he continued to hope for the best.

He well understood how difficult it must be for a boat to approach her as she lay on the ledge, but he hoped to creep in on the leeward side, where the vessel and the ledge would break both waves and wind.

The light on the vessel came from a strong reflector, and it was flung toward the shore.

The boys well knew how the imperiled ones on board were staring into the track of that light, waiting and longing for the appearance of the boat, which they must have seen put off from the shore, as revealed by the glare of the bonfire.

At length they came into the track of light made by the reflector, and along this they battled inch by inch.

Sometimes they fancied they could hear faint cries from the vessel, but they could not be sure it was not the shrieking of the wind.

In a momentary cessation of the wind, Frank shouted:

"We're bound to get there, boys! Strong and steady now, and we'll make her soon."

Nearer and nearer they crept, the light shining out

about them, while the thunder of the waves that were bursting over the ledge was deafening.

As they drew nearer into the lee of the ledge, Frank could see a most appalling spectacle. The great waves from the open sea were breaking madly over Tiger Tooth, shooting mountains of foaming water upward toward the frowning blackness of the heavens, out of which the rain seemed wrested and torn in sheets by the savage wind.

The vessel had been hurled far up on the ledge, and there she clung, for all of the waves which were running over her, for all that the ledge flung foaming water higher than her masthead.

Getting into the lee of the ledge, the boys were able to make better headway.

The vessel broke the fury of the wind in a measure, and Frank held steadily up to leeward, wondering how near they could approach.

It did not take him long to see that the vessel was fixed on the crest of the ledge, and that she was liable to be flung clean over by the wind and waves, if she did not break in two.

The waves on that side of the ledge were not of a dangerous sort, but the sea was swirling round and round, sometimes rushing inward to the ledge, and Frank saw there was danger of being flung up against the vessel, and so having the boat smashed in the twinkling of an eye.

This danger he succeeded in making the others understand, and he directed them to work slowly, ready to send the boat ahead when he should give the signal.

The light of the reflector showed sailors who were ready with boathooks and grapples to fasten upon the boat when it came near enough.

Frank watched his time, and when it came, his war-cry rang out once more:

"Go ahead!"

They sent the boat in against the swirling water, so it was not hurled upon the vessel, and Frank brought it near enough to the vessel for the grapples and boathooks to seize it.

"In oars!"

In they came, and up the rope ladders skipped the lads, like so many monkeys, Frank bearing the end of the line which connected them with the shore.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE DOOMED SCHOONER.

Hodge brought up the painter from the boat.

The scene on the deck of the doomed vessel was indescribable. Every one but the captain seemed frantic with fear, and they acted like madmen.

The vessel was a three-masted schooner, being comparatively new, which accounted for the remarkable manner in which she had withstood the tempest and the shock of being driven on the ledge. She was rolling heavily, and seemed to be slipping inch by inch over the ledge.

The captain's wife and daughter were lashed to the mainmast, which was a magnificent stick, and stood like a well-rooted tree, although the fierce blasts made it bend and sway.

One of her masts was gone, while reefed canvas had been blown away by the terrible gale.

The captain met the lads as they clambered to the deck.

"Have you brought a line from shore?"

"Yes, sir; here it is."

In a moment the captain had the line, and he quickly made it fast, so that it should not be torn from the hands that held it.

"Isn't she liable to break in two, captain?" Frank shouted, keeping close to the old skipper.

"There's more danger that she will roll clean over the ledge into deep water beyond. She'll go down like a rock if she does."

"Who are the women?"

"My wife and daughter."

"Take no chances; get them into the boat, with five good men at the oars. We brought that boat out here, and sailors should be able to take it back."

"What of you?"

"We'll find a way of getting ashore by means of the life line."

It was no time for hesitation, as the captain well knew; every moment was precious—each moment wasted might mean the loss of a human life.

With a ready knife, the captain set about cutting the woman and girl free from the lashings.

Just then a mighty wave burst over the schooner, lifted her, dropped her with a terrible shock on the ledge, and the waters sunk away till she careened far over.

"She's going over!" shrieked the terrified sailors. "We're lost—lost!"

Some yelled and some prayed, while the wind howled and laughed like a thousand gloating demons.

Above all other sounds, now rang the voice of a young sailor:

"She's breaking up! To the boat!—to the boat!"

Frank understood what this meant, and he sprang to stop the desperate men, shouting to the boys:

"Here, lads! Stand in—stand in!"

"We're wid yez, me b'y!" cried Barney Mulloy.

"Yes, with you to the death!" rang the voice of Bart Hodge.

They intercepted the sailors who would have leaped into the boat and put off.

"Back!" ordered Frank, with up-flung hand. "The captain's wife and daughter are first to enter the boat!"

"Get out!" snarled the young sailor, who was leading the rush. "Get away, or we'll throw you overboard!"

His eyes were blazing, and down his left cheek Frank saw a livid scar.

This fellow flung himself straight forward, but Merriwell blocked the way.

With all the strength of a muscular arm, Frank drove his hard right fist into the face of the young sailor, and the fellow was sent to the deck in a moment. He struck heavily, and did not offer to rise.

But that did not stop the rush of the sailors, who were frantic with fear.

Hodge and Mulloy had secured belaying pins, and, with these, they fought the sailors back, sending more than one of the men reeling with bruised heads.

In the meantime the captain was doing his best to get his wife and daughter safely into the boat, which was no easy task, as may be readily understood. It had seemed that the rush of the sailors would be successful, and, not wishing to free the females of the lashings in such a case, he had hesitated.

He saw Frank knock the leader down with a single powerful blow, and then he saw the other lads beat the men back with the aid of the belaying pins.

But this respite was for no more than a few moments at most. He understood that the men would make another rush, and he hastened to free his wife.

Then a cry of despair went up:

"The boat—the boat has been smashed against the vessel!"

This was true.

The swirling sea had swept round the ledge and flung the boat against the schooner with sufficient force to crash in one side, and she quickly filled with water, floating a useless thing near at hand.

The moment the captain realized what had happened.

he set about lashing his wife to the mast once more, speaking to her encouragingly.

When the sailors realized what had happened, they became strangely calm.

"The only hope now lies in the life-line!" shouted Frank.

The captain was quickly on hand, and, as he reached Frank's side, he said:

"I will look after the drawing in of the line. Will you be good enough to cheer up my wife and daughter?"

"Certainly, sir."

As Frank turned toward the mast to which the females were lashed, the young sailor he had knocked down sat up on the wave-washed deck. The fellow's eyes found Frank, and he screamed:

"I'll make you pay dearly for that blow!"

Merriwell did not heed the man. As soon as possible he reached the woman and girl, and did his best to cheer them up.

The woman seemed in a stupor, but the girl's senses were active, and she quickly asked:

"Is there any hope? Tell me the truth. I can stand it, and I had rather know the truth than be deceived."

Her golden hair was soaked with rain and sea-water, and driven about her face and shoulders, but Frank saw that she was pretty, and there was a brave look in her eyes—a brave ring in her voice.

"Certainly there is hope," he replied. "We brought a line from the shore, and the men are drawing it in. It it attached to a heavy rope that will bear almost any strain."

"What can be done when the rope is drawn aboard?"

"Some kind of a life-car will be rigged up. It is possible your father has a breeches buoy on board."

"Isn't there a life-saving station near?"

"It is two miles away; but the coast guard should have reached this locality by this time."

"They would bring a life-car."

"Or a breeches buoy—yes."

"But the schooner may go to pieces before it can be worked."

"She is standing it well now," replied Frank, clinging to the lashings which held the girl, as a great wave came down upon them.

He seemed to see the girl's eyes turned in admiration upon him, and she spoke so coolly that he wondered at her bravery.

"I saw you knock Carlos Merriwell down," she said. "That was magnificently done!"

"Saw me knock down whom?" shouted Frank, in astonishment.

"Carlos Merriwell."

"Is that fellow's name Merriwell?"

"So he is called."

"Merriwell is my own name, and I do not know of a family, save my own, by that name."

"He may be a relative of yours."

"Impossible!"

At this moment a great cry of despair went up from the sailors who had been drawing in the rope.

"The line has parted! We are lost! We are lost!"

CHAPTER XL.

THE COAST GUARD.

The men rushed wildly about the deck, shrieking, moaning and praying. The schooner's boats had been carried away long before she struck on Tiger Tooth Ledge, and now there seemed no hope that a single soul on board would ever reach shore alive. The wind howled joyously, and the great waves hurled themselves over the vessel, causing her to roll and lurch. One miserable wretch was caught in the clutch of a great wave and swept away, his death shriek sounding above the howling of the tempest.

Many of the sailors seemed to have gone mad. One man with a strong voice took to singing a wild sea song, stopping now and then to laugh and wave his long arms above his head. Another tore his hair and swore in a terrible manner. Some seemed dazed and stupid, as if they did not realize their position, or were utterly overcome by the horror of it.

Wildest among them was the young sailor with the scarred face. He rushed at the captain and struck him in the face, screaming in his ear:

"You put me in the hold for disobeying orders, and I could do nothing! Now we are all doomed to death, and I will even my score with you! Take that!—that!—that!"

The fourth blow knocked the captain down, and then the sailor kicked him. The captain squirmed away, and the ruffian followed him up to kick him again.

But the captain's daughter had witnessed the assault on her father, and she cried to Frank:

"Save him! save him!"

It seemed that the crazed young ruffian intended to stamp the life out of the master, but he was not allowed to accomplish his purpose. Once before had he felt Frank Merriwell's fist, and now he felt it again.

The blow fell fairly behind the brute's right ear, and again he was knocked down.

He sat up to see Frank assisting the captain to his feet, and then all hands hastened to clutch something and cling fast, as another monster sea swept over the schooner.

Frank half-dragged, half-led the captain to a position near his wife and daughter. The man seemed to have been severely injured.

"Are you hurt much?" asked Frank.

The captain replied, but the howling of the storm drowned his words. He did not have much strength, as Frank plainly saw. It was evident that he, too, had lost heart when the line parted.

Frank found a line, which he quickly bound about the man's body, securing it to the mast.

The boys now gathered around their leader, and it was plain that most of them felt that their case was hopeless.

"We're done for, old man!" cried Bart Hodge. "It's wonderful how long the schooner has stood this sort of wrenching. She will go to pieces soon."

"Perhaps she may hold together long enough for them to get another boat off to us. By this time they must have discovered that the line has parted."

"There is no other boat that can ride this sea, if there were men to handle one."

"The life savers should be on hand by this time. If the vessel holds together long enough, they will find a way of reaching us."

"The chances are against it."

"Don't give up the ship!" cried Frank, quoting the words of Commodore Perry. "While there's life there's hope!"

The boys fell to watching the light of the fire near the old boathouse, which could be seen through the driving clouds of spray.

"You are so brave—so noble!" cried the captain's daughter, whose eyes were fastened steadily on Frank. "Is my poor father hurt much?"

"He seems to be stunned and dazed, but I think that is all," was the reply.

Frank had to cling close to her in order to hear her words. Although she was lashed to the mast, her arms were free, and he suddenly found them about his neck. A moment later she kissed him.

"That is for poor father," she declared. "You saved him from that ruffian!"

Somehow, considering the circumstances, the action did not seem so unladylike. It was the impulsive action of a young girl who saw in Frank the embodiment of all that was noble and heroic. The storm, the peril, the seeming hopelessness of their position had much to do with her action.

Still Frank was not a little confused, but she clung to him as he started back.

"Don't leave me!" she implored. "Somehow, it seems that you give me courage for anything—courage to face death itself. Don't leave me, will you?"

"No."

"Tell me your name."

"Frank Merriwell."

"Mine is Elsie Bellwood."

For all of his perilous situation, Frank thought that it was a pretty name.

There was a brief space of time, during which no words were exchanged. The wild sea thundered at the ledge and tore past in sheets of spray.

Frank was staring toward the shore, and a cry finally broke from his lips:

"The coast guard—they are there!"

That was enough to give new life and hope to those on board the doomed schooner. In the light of the fire figures were moving about. There was great activity on shore. Something was going to happen.

"It must be the coast guard!" shouted Paul Rains. "Oh, if this old vessel will hold together a short time longer!"

"Are they putting off in a boat?"

"I can't see; but they are doing something."

Now new hope and life came to the despairing sailors, who clung to anything solid, in order to keep themselves from being swept away into the sea. If the coast guard had arrived, there was a possible chance for some of them —perhaps for all on board the schooner.

Every eye was turned toward the shore.

A cry went up—a cry from every throat on the schooner.

A red flash had been seen, and, although they heard no report, they knew a gun had been fired.

What did it mean?

They found out a few seconds later, for something passed over the schooner and fell on the windward side.

Frank Merriwell released the hands that clung to him, leaped forward, and caught up something.

"It's a line!" he shouted. "They have shot a life-line across to us!"

It was true. The first shot had been amazingly successful, considering the terrible wind and the darkness.

The sailors had been in despair a few seconds before.

Now they cheered, and sprang to grasp the life-line and draw in on it .

"Steady!" called Frank, clearly and distinctly. "Remember the other line parted. If such a thing happens to this, it is not likely we will be given a third opportunity before the schooner breaks up. Get hold and pull in steadily. Now, haul away!"

The greatest danger was from over-eagerness, and this Frank cautioned them against. At that moment it seemed as if he were in command of the schooner. So far as the real captain was concerned, he might as well have been. The man had not recovered from the brutal assault upon him, and he looked on in a stupid way, without saying or doing anything.

Some of the boys would have given their aid on the line, but Frank kept them away.

"Don't touch it, lads," was his order. "You are not sailors, and these men know far better how to handle a case like this."

He was right. In due time the heavy cable was drawn in and made fast under the directions of the first mate. When this was accomplished, the sailors set to pulling in on the free line, and it was not long before a breeches buoy was drawn from the shore to the schooner. Again the sailors cheered, and Frank was heard to cry:

"The captain's wife first, men; then comes the captain's daughter. Be cool and steady, and every soul may escape."

CHAPTER XLI.

THE WORK OF RESCUE.

Now that but one could escape at a time, no man led a rush for the breeches buoy. Had any one sought to crowd in, he would have been hurled to the deck with very little ceremony by the very sailors who had made the mad scramble for the boat.

Ready hands assisted Frank in freeing the captain's wife and assisting her to the breeches buoy.

The woman did not wish to leave her daughter and her injured husband, but the strong arms of Frank lifted her and carried her to the rail, where he was aided by the first mate in placing her securely in the breeches buoy.

The mate spoke a few hasty words of instruction to the distracted woman, and then the signal was given for those on shore to haul away.

Away into the darkness, into the very sea it seemed, slipped the breeches buoy and its human burden. The line ran out rapidly from the schooner, telling what progress the buoy was making.

There was no longer frantic excitement on board the vessel. The sailors had grown calm, and they obeyed orders promptly and faithfully. It was a most remarkable change from the prevailing condition of things a short time before.

The storm seemed to have abated somewhat in its fury, as if, feeling itself baffled, it had grown sullen. Heavy waves continued to break on the ledge, and send clouds of spray across the schooner, but the vessel seemed to be

pounding with reduced force, and the hope that she might hold together long enough for all to escape grew apace.

The free line soon ran out, and then came the signal from the beach that the captain's wife had arrived safely, and the sailors began drawing in the breeches buoy.

Frank hastened to the side of the captain's daughter.

"Your mother has reached the shore in safety," he said. "You are to follow her."

"No, no! my father—send my poor father!"

"But——"

"He is injured—can't you see? Perhaps there is a doctor on the shore who may be able to do something for him."

"I am sure he would not wish to go until you are safe."

"And I will not go until he has gone! Don't touch me! I tell you I will not go!"

"But the schooner may not hold together long enough for——"

"In that case it were better for me to be lost than for my father and mother to be parted. Send him ashore—please do!"

"Are you sure that you realize——"

"I am sure that I refuse to go till father has been sent ashore. That's all."

Frank saw she was determined, for she almost fought him when he tried to release the lashings that held her to the mast. No time was to be lost, and so he turned to Captain Bellwood. The man said nothing, allowing Frank to assist him to the side of the vessel, which was reached just as the breeches buoy arrived.

A sudden cry rang out, and the young sailor with the scarred face lunged toward the rail.

"What's the meaning of this?" he snarled. "Is that old whelp to go before the rest of us? Throw him overboard, mates!"

Frank placed himself in a position to defend the captain, at the same time appealing to the sailors.

"Keep that man off, men! He has nearly killed Captain Bellwood, and now he would finish the work. We are all of us going to escape in our turn, and you want no hand in any dirty work performed by this creature. Let him suffer alone, while you are praised and honored for protecting your captain."

A cry of fury broke from the young sailor's lips, and he would have hurled himself at Frank once more, but a dark-faced Italian whipped out a knife and blocked the way, shrilly crying:

"Stand-a back, Car-r-r-los! No touch-a de cap. You try-a dat, I give-a you dis! I no want-a go in da jail-a, all same like-a you. I touch-a da cap' on one ves', stay in da jail-a two year. Stand-a back!"

The scar-faced sailor started back before the knife which quivered in the hand of the excited Italian.

"You dirty dago!" he snarled.

The Italian crouched as if he were about to leap on the fellow and use the ready knife. For an instant it looked as if a bloody tragedy might be enacted there, but the Italian seemed to regain control of himself, for he put up the knife, crying:

"Keep-a back. You say dat now; sometime we set'l-a."

In the meantime two of the men had been assisting the dazed captain into the breeches buoy, so very little time was lost. The signal was given, and into the darkness glided the master of the doomed vessel.

Once more Frank hastened back to the side of the brave girl who was lashed to the mast.

"Your father has gone. You must follow him as swiftly as possible, Miss Bellwood."

"When do you come, Mr. Merriwell?"

"I shall be one of the last to go ashore."

"I am not afraid to remain yet a while longer. Let some of the men who are frightened go next."

Frank felt his admiration for this strange girl increasing.

"You are very brave, Miss Bellwood," he cried, so she could hear him above the sound of the storm; "but such a thing is not possible. The sailors would not hear to it. You must go next."

"And you may remain till the vessel breaks up and you are lost. That is all wrong. You risked your life to come off here for our sakes; you should be the first sent ashore."

"Oh, but I decline to go."

"I shall pray for you—I shall pray that you come safely through all this peril!"

"Thank you, Miss Bellwood."

Near at hand was crouching a man who heard many of their words.

"Pray for him—pray for him!" grated Carlos Merriwell. "Your prayers shall not save him! If he remains long enough, he'll never set his feet on dry land again! Who is he? She called him Merriwell. Can it be possible he is the one I have reason to hate above all others in this world? If so, our meeting will be most opportune. He shall become food for the fishes!"

Frank did not know a most deadly foe crouched near at hand, and watched him as he released the captain's daughter from the lashings that held her to the mast.

The girl clung to Frank, for the waves were sending sheets of spray across the deck, and the wind came in swirls that tried to lift and bear her away. Her arms were about his neck once more, and she murmured again:

"I shall pray for you."

At that moment Frank was tempted to return the kiss

she had so impulsively given him a short time before. Her lips were near, and they seemed to invite such a caress.

Through his mind flashed a thought of Inza Burrage, the beautiful girl he had three times saved from death, the girl who admired and trusted him above all other lads in the world.

It was true that it was no more than a boy and girl affection between them, it was true that he had exacted no promises from Inza, and had given her none, but still he felt that they were something more than friends, and this feeling kept him from returning the kiss of the pretty girl who clung to him.

The sailors were drawing in the breeches buoy, and Elsie Bellwood must be ready to leave the schooner as soon as she could be placed in it.

It is possible she divined something of the temptation that had assailed Frank, and it is possible she felt disappointment when he held the impulse in check. But she clung close to him, and her round, wet cheek came against his face as he lifted her and bore her quickly to the side of the schooner.

The breeches buoy came gliding out of the darkness and ran into the schooner's side.

It was necessary for all who entered it to get in without regard to any disadvantage at which it might place them. For a man it was not so bad, but it was certainly an awkward thing for a woman to enter. Once in the breeches, a person could be fastened so there was little chance to get out until released.

Frank spoke encouraging words to the girl. He told her to cling fast, to hold her breath when the buoy seemed to break away and plunge beneath the waves, as it sometimes would, and to have perfect faith in the strength and security of the arrangement.

"I shall do exactly as you direct," was her assurance. "And I shall wait on the shore till you come off. I cannot rest till I know you are safe."

They swung her over the side, but her hands clung to his till the signal was given. Then he saw her slide swiftly down the cable that seemed to lead into the depths of the boiling sea.

The work of rescue was carried on as swiftly as possible, and Frank's five companions alternated with five sailors in taking their turn to ride ashore in the breeches buoy.

Frank had resolved to remain and be the last one off.

Finally all the sailors but the first mate seemed to have gone. The mate ordered Frank into the breeches buoy, but Frank declined to go.

"What's the matter with you?" shouted the man, angrily.

"Go on," cried Frank. "Let me come last."

At this moment a terrible wave surged over the ledge, lifting the schooner and bringing her down with a crash that splintered her bottom and shook her in every joint.

"Stay and drown!" shouted the mate, as he made haste to get into the buoy.

Away he went into the darkness, away toward the light that was gleaming on the shore.

Frank felt that he was alone on the doomed vessel, and a strange feeling came over him. It was not a feeling of fear, but a sensation of unutterable awe as he contemplated the power of the storm-tossed sea to wrench and beat and destroy.

Then a cry came from his lips.

From out of the darkness glided a moving form—a human figure! He was not alone on the deck of the fated schooner; a deadly foe was at hand.

Carlos Merriwell was there!

CHAPTER XLII.

CAST INTO THE SEA.

"You—you!" cried Frank. "I thought you were on shore!"

"Not much," yelled back the young sailor with the scarred face. "I waited—waited for you!"

There was something deadly in his crouching manner and his words. Frank realized that he was now in the most fearful peril.

"Waited—for me?"

"Yes; I wanted to see you alone!"

"Well, I am here."

"Is your name Frank Merriwell?"

"It is."

"Then you are the very one I resolved long ago to find—to find and kill!"

He snarled the words. One hand was thrust into his breast, while with the other he clung to the shrouds.

"Man, you are mad!" cried Frank, retreating a step.

"Oh, I am sane enough. I concealed myself and waited, hoping they would not miss me—hoping they would think I had been swept overboard or gone ashore. I watched you. You wanted to be able to say that you were the last to leave this vessel, and that desire held you here—held you here for me!"

The wind tore over the vessel, and his words were drowned for the moment; but in the next lull, he went on:

"Twice have you struck me this night, and I never for-

get a blow. That was enough to make me long for your death—to cause me to kill you, if given an opportunity like this! But, now that I know you—now that I know you are the one who will rob me of what is rightfully mine if I live, I shall have no more compunction in striking you down than I would were you a dog!"

"You talk in riddles, man. How have I robbed you?"

Again the wind set up a fearful howling, and Frank did not understand the reply which the sailor made.

"The fellow's deranged," thought Frank. "There is no question about that. I shall have to fight for life againts a madman."

The thought would have unnerved some lads, but it served to steel Frank for the struggle that must come. He would do his best. Hand to hand, he believed he would be more than a match for the sailor, in case the other were unarmed.

But the sailor was not unarmed.

From the shore came the signal for the buoy to be drawn back to the vessel.

Then Frank's foe drew a knife and came sidling along the rail toward the lad.

Frank knew the time when he must fight for his life had come, and the odds seemed against him.

He was forced to retreat as the sailor advanced, and then the man laughed harshly, sneeringly.

"You can't escape me!" he declared. "You may delay the game a bit, but that is all."

Frank made no reply. His hands were seeking some weapon of defense, and they finally found it in a belaying-pin.

All at once, Frank changed his tactics, and suddenly advanced on the other.

The sailor paused in surprise, lifting the knife.

Frank made an agile leap, the pin swished through the air, and the knife was knocked from the sailor's hand.

The man gave a cry of rage, and closed in with Frank before the latter could strike him down.

Then began a fearful struggle.

The sailor was several years older than Frank, and the life he had led seemed to have made him strong to a surprising extent. Although Frank had twice knocked him down, he found it quite different when they came to grapple.

But the boy knew he was fighting for life, and he battled like a cornered tiger.

Round and round over that slippery deck they writhed and whirled, never minding the seas that swept over them, never minding the wind that threatened to hurl them, clasped in each other's arms, into the surging billows, never minding anything but that they were fighting for life.

Sometimes they slipped and fell, but they would struggle up and resume the fierce battle.

In this manner they worked their way over to the windward side of the schooner, and here Frank was flung with such force upon the deck that he was stunned for the moment. He realized his peril, but he could do nothing to save himself, and through his brain flashed the thought:

"This is the end!"

A wild laugh came from the lips of the sailor. Then he lifted Frank in his arms and hurled him over the rail into the boiling sea!

Back across the deck staggered the sailor. Once more a mighty wave swept over the schooner, and the man clung to the shrouds till its force was spent. He then clutched the line and began drawing in the breeches buoy, working with a wild, fierce energy, and muttering to himself:

"No human being saw the act, yet he is dead and forever out of the way! Even though I may be suspected, nothing can ever be proved against me."

It did not take him long to draw in the breeches buoy, into which he quickly climbed. Then he gave the signal, and, clinging fast, felt himself jerked swiftly down the incline into the darkness of the storm-swept sea. Waves rolled over him, filling his mouth and eyes with brackish water, he was beaten and thumped and robbed of his breath, he seemed assailed by a hundred hands that were trying to tear him from the buoy and drag him into the depths of the sea. He fancied that the hands of the lad he had hurled from the schooner a few minutes before clutched at him, and he seemed to feel that the dead boy was pursuing him in his mad rush through the tops of the waves. On every side of him he fancied he saw the dead face of Frank Merriwell, with the staring eyes turned accusingly upon him, and that face was following, following, following!

At last he understood what it meant, and he was aroused to fury. He could not escape the corpse; it was following him to the shore, where it would appear as evidence against him!

"Pull! pull! pull!"

Even as that frantic, gurgling cry broke from his lips, he saw a blinding glare of light before him, felt a shock, and found he had reached the shore.

More dead than alive, he was dragged from the breeches buoy. He could scarcely stand, and he looked shudderingly around, as if seeking the dead face that had pursued him through the billows.

The cadets had rushed forward to greet him, but they stopped, staring in astonishment and consternation at the sailor.

"It's not Merriwell!" cried Barney Mulloy. "It's thot imp av th' ould b'y!"

Hodge confronted the sailor.

"Where is Frank Merriwell?" he demanded. "Did you leave him on the vessel?"

"If you mean that boy," was the husky reply, "he was swept overboard by a big wave just before I got into the breeches. I tried to catch him as the wave swept him past, but I failed."

"I believe that's a lie!" Hodge passionately cried. "I believe you cast him overboard yourself!"

CHAPTER XLIII.

OUT OF THE SEA.

Frank had not perished in the sea. He had been cast over the windward rail of the doomed schooner, and the next wave flung him back on deck, where he caught at anything his fingers touched, grasped a rope, and held fast.

But he was too dazed and confused to make any move for some moments after the wave had swept over the schooner. When he did try to get up, he found that what he had passed through had robbed him of his strength, so he was weak as a kitten.

He knew not what had become of his deadly foe, but felt certain the man would lose little time in taking to the breeches buoy and getting ashore.

It seemed to Frank that he lay for hours clinging to that rope, occasionally washed by the seas that poured over the schooner. Down in the bowels of the vessel he could hear the water swishing and gurgling, and he knew the schooner must go down in a moment if she slipped from the ledge.

In time his strength came back to him, and he was able to get upon his feet, still clinging to something to keep from being washed overboard by the seas or blown away by the strong wind.

He knew where to find the life line, and he sought it without delay, for the vessel was shivering and straining in a way that foretold her immediate dissolution.

Something caused him to think of Elsie Bellwood, and

he wondered if her prayers had in any way been instrumental in his marvelous escape from death in the sea. He knew she had kept her word and prayed for his life, and the thought that she was still praying for him gave him faith to believe he would yet reach the shore in safety.

With no little difficulty he repressed a frantic desire to make haste—to do something desperate.

"Keep cool, old fellow!" he muttered. "The chap who keeps cool stands the best show in a moment of danger."

So he kept cool. He found the cable, he found the line that was attached to the breeches buoy, and he began pulling in on it.

That act produced unutterable excitement and wonder on shore, where it was believed that Frank had perished. The breeches buoy ran along the cable and disappeared in the direction of the schooner, the locality of which was plainly indicated by the reflector light that still flung its rays out over the storm-tortured sea.

"What is the meaning of that?" cried one of the life-savers. "I thought all living beings were off the vessel."

"Mean!" panted Bart Hodge, excitedly. "It must mean that Frank Merriwell is there! It must mean that he has not perished!"

"Hurro!" shouted Barney Mulloy. "Me back tathe are chattering to clap oies on th' lad!"

A suppressed cheer went up from those immediately near the termination of the life-line, but Hodge suppressed it with a gesture.

"Wait!" he shouted; "wait and make sure it is Frank! Then, if it is, you may split your throats!"

The sailor with the scarred face had been most astounded by the movement of the breeches buoy.

"What is the meaning of that?" he thought. "It can't

be Merriwell. I am sure I fixed that young whelp. It might be that one of the men was overlooked and is still on board."

But it was said all the men had come off in the breeches buoy, save the miserable wretch who had been swept overboard.

A new fear seized upon the sailor of the scarred face. What he had passed through was enough to shake stronger nerves than he possessed, and now he fancied that it was the corpse of Frank pulling at the breeches buoy. He fancied that the buoy would be drawn in with a corpse standing upright in the breeches, a frightful accusation against him.

The attention of every one was turned toward the schooner, and the line that was still running out.

"Now is my time to get out of the way," thought the scar-faced sailor. "If by any chance something should happen—well, I'll not be here."

It was an easy thing for him to slip away into the darkness, but he remained near enough to see what burden the breeches buoy brought.

Elsie Bellwood had heard all that passed, having refused to seek shelter till she knew Frank was safe. She had been stabbed to the heart by a pang of unutterable anguish when Carlos Merriwell brought the report that Frank had been swept overboard, but she felt certain there had been foul play. She had prayed for Frank, and she continued to do so.

It was a strange sight to see that eager, earnest girl there amid the men, refusing to be taken away till the last one had come ashore from the schooner, and many wondering eyes were directed upon her.

At length the line ceased running out, and all knew the buoy had reached the schooner.

Eagerly the signal to pull away was awaited.

It came, and the men lay to with a will.

Each moment added to the inexpressible excitement on the shore, where the cadets now crowded down as far as the rolling breakers would allow, refusing to be driven back.

Frank was universally esteemed among the instructors at Fardale Academy, but, of them all, Professor Scotch cared most for the lad. He had come to regard Frank with positive affection, and the little man's excitement and eagerness were pitiful to witness. Wet to the knees with the waves that rolled far up the beach, he stood and wrung his hands, staring into the darkness where the life-line led down and vanished toward the light that gleamed far out on Tiger Tooth Ledge.

The life savers pulled away at the line that ran to the breeches buoy, and every one knew the buoy must appear in a few seconds.

"Here it comes!"

The light of the fire showed a black object that skimmed the tops of the waves, coming nearer, nearer, nearer.

"Who is it?"

"Is it Merriwell?"

"Look! Look for yourselves!"

"It is Frank Merriwell—alive! Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!"

Yes, it was Frank the breeches buoy brought from the jaws of death to the arms of his comrades and friends.

When she saw his face, Elsie Bellwood murmured thanks to Heaven, staggering toward the open door of the old boathouse, to fall swooning across the threshold.

Great and unutterable was the joy of the cadets. In unison they cheered, and the roar of their voices sounded above the roar of the baffled and defeated storm.

But Frank had reached the shore none too soon. Far out on Tiger Tooth Ledge the light was seen to sway, and then, in the twinkling of an eye, it disappeared.

The schooner had slipped from the ledge and gone down!

CHAPTER XLIV.

CARLOS MERRIWELL.

The wild night passed, and a bright and beautiful morning followed. But for the dripping, rain-drenched world and the heavy sea which still flung itself over Tiger Tooth Ledge and beat against Black Bluff, there were few evidences of the terrible storm.

The captain of the lost schooner, together with his wife, daughter and the sailors, had been cared for by the people of Fardale village.

Frank had been taken to the academy and put to bed in a warm room, and he came forth fresh and unruffled in the morning, ready to attend to his duties as an under officer.

But it was believed that he had a tale to tell, and he was summoned to the presence of Professor Gunn, the head master, with whom he found Professor Scotch.

The head master greeted Frank with dignity, but the little professor cast dignity to the winds, and wrung the lad's hand warmly.

"It was a grand thing—a noble thing to see six of our young men row away into the teeth of that storm," declared Scotch. "And you, Mr. Merriwell, you gave them confidence. But for you, they could not have done it. You were their leader."

"So far as I have been able to learn," observed Professor Gunn, "Mr. Merriwell has been the leader in almost everything that is praiseworthy and commendable since he entered the academy."

"True, true, true!" vigorously nodded the little professor. "He is a remarkable youth—a wonderful youth! He is a model young American, and an honor to the academy!"

Frank was blushing in confusion, for it was but natural that such open praise from the professors should bring color to his face.

"I always try to do what is right," he said.

"I am sure you do," asserted Professor Gunn. "And when you feel that a thing should be done, you have courage enough to go ahead and do it!"

"'Go ahead' is my motto, sir."

"And a very good one it is, young man. It would be a good motto for most young Americans, for push is what is needed in these days, and the lad who does not possess it stands very little show of getting to the top."

"But we did not call you here to flatter you," laughed Professor Scotch, in his big, heavy voice, which was several sizes too large for his body. "We want to ask you a few questions."

"That's right," nodded the head master.

"I shall be happy to answer them, if possible," assured Frank.

"A very singular thing happened last night," said Professor Scotch. "You were the last to leave the ill-fated vessel."

"Yes, sir."

"Until the very moment that you arrived in the breeches buoy no one on shore was sure it could be you."

"How was that?"

"The man who came before you reported that you had been swept overboard and drowned."

"The miserable wretch! He tried to murder me!"

"I knew it! I was sure of it!" roared Professor Scotch, excitedly.

"Tell us all about it," directed Professor Gunn, who was scarcely less excited.

So Frank told of the terrible struggle on board the schooner, and how a great wave flung him back to the deck of the vessel after his foe had cast him overboard.

"The wretch!" thundered the little professor. "He came ashore and reported that you had been swept into the sea by a great wave; but Mr. Hodge accused him of foul play, and the captain's daughter refused to believe him. Before you came ashore he disappeared. I have made inquiries concerning him, and I find that he was known as Carlos Merriwell, under which name he shipped."

"And he seems to have a deadly feeling of animosity against you," observed Professor Gunn.

"Which leads us to believe he knew of you before your meeting last night."

"We do not wish to be curious concerning your family secrets, but——"

"Not at all, but——"

Both men stopped and stared at Frank in a most inquiring way.

"This Carlos Merriwell seems in some way related to me," said Frank; "but to my knowldege, I never met the fellow before. More than that, I never heard of him."

The professors looked disappointed.

"He must be a relative," said Professor Gunn; "and it would seem that you have given him reason to hate you."

"I do not think he is in any way related to me, as I am the only son of my father, and my father's only brother, my Uncle Asher, has been a woman-hater all his life, and is a bachelor."

The look of disappointment grew on the faces of the professors. They were very loth to relinquish the belief that the mysterious sailor of the scarred face was in some way connected by blood ties with Frank.

"Your uncle is your guardian?" questioned Professor Gunn, although no one knew this better than he.

"Yes, sir."

"And he is very wealthy?"

"He is wealthy in a modest manner, but he cannot be said to be very wealthy. In the country, he is regarded as a rich man, but his fortune would be considered quite small in any large city."

"Still it is large enough to make a near relative covet it?"

"Without doubt."

"And a conscienceless scoundrel might be led to attempt murder for it."

"Possibly."

"Have you no reason to think that Carlos Merriwell believes you stand between him and that fortune?"

Frank was about to answer no, but he suddenly checked himself, for, with a rush, came the remembrance of the scar-faced sailor's words, as they stood alone, face to face, on the deck of the schooner. He remembered that the sailor had said something about being robbed of what was rightfully his.

The professors noted this hesitation, and they bent eagerly forward, watching Frank's expressive face.

For several moments the boy was silent, and then he slowly said:

"I don't know but I dreamed it, but it seems that, when we were alone on the schooner, he did declare that I stood between him and what rightfully belonged to him."

"Ah!"

With that exclamation, both men straightened up, satisfaction expressed on their faces.

"Young man," said Professor Gunn, "I am convinced that you will discover in time that this person is in some way related to you. I am convinced that he is a most deadly and dangerous enemy, and I advise you to swear out a warrant for his arrest without delay. If you do not, it is possible that he may find a way to complete the work he attempted last night."

"That's right, that's right!" nodded Professor Scotch.

"If you wish to push this matter, you are released from duty for the day," said the head master.

Frank improved the opportunity to leave the academy grounds and visit the village, for his curiosity concerning Carlos Merriwell had been thoroughly aroused, and he longed to solve the mystery which seemed to hang around the scar-faced sailor.

Not only that, but he felt a strong desire to see Elsie Bellwood once more, and tell her that he believed her prayers had something to do with bringing him safely through the terrible perils of the night. Through all his dreams her face had seemed to float, smiling down upon him, and he had awakened with the fancy that he again felt her lips touching his.

He stepped off briskly toward the village, the lightness of his heart being evinced by the lively air he whistled.

Resolved to visit the post office first, he did so, and called for his mail.

A drop letter, postmarked Fardale, and bearing a date that told it had been mailed that morning, was handed him.

His name was written upon the envelope in scrawling chirography.

Frank regarded the latter in surprise.

"I wonder whom this is from?" he muttered.

Quickly tearing the envelope open, he extracted a sheet of paper, on which was written a single line:

You have not seen the last of me. CARLOS MERRIWELL.

CHAPTER XLV.

JEALOUSY.

"Whew!"

Frank whistled, expressive of his feelings.

"It is plain the fellow means business, and I shall have to look out for myself. He failed in his murderous attempt last night, but he is not going to let the matter drop there. Well, I'll lose no time in setting an officer after him."

Frank went at once to a justice of the peace, and had a warrant sworn out for the arrest of the mysterious sailor, and he did not rest till he saw the warrant in the hands of the sheriff, who was instructed to find the man and take him into custody as soon as possible.

But it was not to prove such an easy thing to find Carlos Merriwell, for the young ruffian knew that he would be in danger, and the postmaster was the only person who was sure he had seen the fellow since the previous night.

The sailor had been forced to enter the village and visit the post office in order to mail the letter, but he had disappeared as soon as possible.

Somewhat to Frank's surprise, he learned that Captain Bellwood, his wife and his daughter, were stopping with Noel Burrage, the father of Inza.

Captain Bellwood would be likely to know something of Carlos Merriwell, so Frank directed his steps toward Inza's home.

As he approached, his steps grew slower, and he hesi-

tated. Somehow a guilty feeling crept into his heart, and he almost feared to see Elsie and Inza together.

He was angry with himself because of this feeling of guilt, for he had done nothing to cause it. True, Elsie had kissed him in a girlish, impulsive way, but he had resisted the temptation to return that kiss. True, he had dreamed of her, but he had not been able to govern his dreams.

Still he dallied, and it was by resolutely crushing the desire to remain away that he finally brought himself to step forward swiftly and approach the house unfalteringly.

Before he reached the gate he saw a familiar face at the window, and the door was flung open as he stepped briskly up the gravel walk.

Inza and Elsie were there to greet him.

"Oh, Frank," cried Inza, "Elsie has told me all about it, and I am so proud of you! It is like you to ever be brave and true."

For some reason, these words cut him, and he winced the least bit.

Elsie gave him her hand, warm and firm, and her eyes were full of admiration. Still he fancied he saw another look there—a look of sadness.

"I would not believe you had perished," she said, earnestly. "I did not give you up—not even when Carlos Merriwell declared you had been swept away by the sea."

"You said you would pray for me."

"I did—I did!"

"And I came safely through every peril."

The two girls presented a strong contrast, though both were pretty. Inza's hair and the tint of her flesh made her a brunette, while Elsie was a blonde, with "eyes of tender blue." By nature, Inza was the more passionate

and jealous, but she could not be more true and faithful. In fact, she was far more liable to change and forget.

In midst of the wild storm, Elsie seemed pretty, but now, attired in one of Inza's dresses, she looked like a little fairy.

Frank noted the mingled sadness and gladness in her eyes, and he hastened to ask:

"Your father—how is he?"

"Oh, he is much better this morning. He was stunned, but otherwise Carlos Merriwell did not injure him severely."

"I am very glad to hear it. I have sworn out a warrant for that ruffian's arrest, and I have come to hear what your father can tell me concerning him."

"In that case, I fear you will meet with disappointment, for it is certain father cannot tell much. However, he is in the parlor, and you may question him."

Frank entered the parlor, and was cordially greeted by Captain Bellwood.

"You are the brave young life-saver who came off to us—who saved me from being kicked to death by that ruffian," he said, as he wrung Frank's hand and gazed closely at the lad. "I owe you much, but all I possess in the world I lost with the *Princess*, a vessel that has taken me through several storms, so I shall not be able to repay you."

"My dear captain, it was very little I did besides rescue you from the sailor, for our boat was wrecked, and the line we brought aboard parted. I have already been paid a thousand times by thanks."

"Gallantly spoken! If all I have heard concerning you since these kind people gave us shelter is true, you are one of the most wonderful young men in the world. If in any way I am ever able to be of assistance to you, you may command me."

"Well, captain, I have learned that the ruffian who attacked you and afterward tried to drown me bears my name—Merriwell. I wish to find out as much as possible concerning him."

"I am afraid I can tell you very little. I shipped him in Liverpool. He shipped as an experienced seaman, but he proved to be no more than a common sailor. He claimed to be a native of the United States, and I fancied he spoke the truth. That is all I know about him, and I do not believe the men can tell you much of anything more, as he was a sulky, sullen sort of person, who seldom spoke of himself or his own affairs. I believe he did get hold of too much grog one day, for he disobeyed orders, claiming to be the heir to great wealth, and I was forced to throw him into the hold for insubordination. That caused him to hate me, and his attack was caused by a desire to get square."

That was all Captain Bellwood could tell Frank concerning Carlos Merriwell, which was rather disappointing.

When Mrs. Bellwood had been brought in and introduced, and they had chatted a short time, the young cadet took his departure.

He found Inza and Elsie waiting at the gate, and they playfully refused to let him pass.

"Why are you in such a hurry to get away?" pouted Inza. "You do not act like yourself, Frank."

"Is that true?" he asked, feebly.

"Is that true?" she repeated, mockingly, a trifle maliciously. "Am I in the habit of fibbing so that you doubt me now?"

"Oh, you know I didn't mean anything of the kind; but I was not aware that I appeared in any but a natural manner."

Somehow his eyes found Elsie's, and Inza, who was watching every glance, bit her lip, her own eyes flashing.

"I may be mistaken in you," she said, sharply. "Possibly it is natural, and what I have believed natural was a veneering. Persons are sometimes deceived in those they fancy they know best."

He did not miss the angry note in her voice, and it brought a shadow to his face.

Elsie turned away, as if she were hurt, and a little cloud had risen between the girls, who had become very friendly in a few short hours, as girls often do.

Frank could but feel that Inza was unjust, and he longed to get away quickly, before her suspicions progressed.

Inza held the gate.

"Still in a hurry?" she asked, with her head thrown back.

"I came to the village on business," he said, "and I have not yet completed it."

"Ah!"—she opened the gate, bowing. "I beg your royal pardon for detaining you. Good-day."

"Good-day, young ladies."

He was walking away when Inza ran after him, caught his arm, and whispered, pantingly:

"So you have found another that you care for more than for me! I am not surprised. Don't deny it! I have eyes, and I can see! I know she cares for you, if that gives you satisfaction! Her words made that plain."

"Inza, I——"

"Stop! Don't fib! It isn't necessary. What do I care! There are thousands of fellows in this world. Don't you think for a moment that I'll be broken-hearted! Ha! ha! ha! I made a mistake in thinking you different from other boys, but now I know boys are all alike."

"But, Inza, this——"

"I tell you I do not care to hear it! I saw it all when you looked at her and she looked at you! Perhaps you fancied I was not discerning enough to detect it! That was a compliment to me! But I don't mind—I don't care! Don't think of me! I shall not give you another thought. Good-by!"

"Inza!"

She was gone. She ran back to where Elsie was waiting, and, with arms about each other, the two girls ran up the steps, a merry laugh pealing from Inza's lips as the door closed behind them.

CHAPTER XLVI.

FIRE!

Frank could not help feeling slightly angered, for he was cut by Inza's injustice. She had given him no opportunity to speak a word in his defense.

For a moment he stood there, undecided, and then he whirled and walked swiftly away. When he was cooler, he laughed a little, muttering:

"Dear little Inza! What a jealous little spitfire she is! And she really thinks she means what she has said."

Despite himself, he was not a little troubled by what had passed.

He sought out several of the sailors, and questioned them concerning Carlos Merriwell, but he learned nothing new or of importance, although they all spoke of hearing Carlos declare that he was the rightful heir to riches.

The mystery of the scar-faced sailor seemed as great as ever, and it troubled Frank considerably. However, he reasoned that the sheriff would arrest the fellow soon, and the truth might be wrested from his lips.

But Carlos Merriwell was not arrested that day.

However, he was hidden in the strip of woods near the academy, and two or three of the cadets saw him.

Frank was warned, as it seemed certain the fellow was lingering near for no good purpose.

"Begobs, Frankie, ye want to kape yer weather oie woide open to-night," said Barney Mulloy. "Th' spalpane manes to do ye harrum."

"That's right," nodded Hodge. "He's waiting his opportunity."

"Perhaps he contemplates creeping into camp and getting in his work to-night," said Paul Rains.

"He'll have a fine time doing that," laughed Frank. "He wouldn't stand one chance in a hundred of getting past the sentries."

"Thot wan chance moight be enough. Take me advoice, Frankie b'y, an' look out sharrup."

"All right, Barney. Be ready to turn out when you hear the alarm."

The alarm came, but not because of any intrusion in the camp.

In Fardale village the fire-bell clanged, and with the second stroke the blare of a bugle sounded through the sleeping camp.

Ta-ra-ta-ra-ta!

Bang!

One of the sentinels discharged his gun.

Bang! bang!

Two more sentinels did likewise.

In an amazingly brief space of time, the cadets came leaping from the tents, finishing the work of dressing as they emerged.

It was not necessary to ask questions, for the clang of the fire-bell told them why they had been aroused.

The academy fire brigade, of which Frank was the chief, quickly formed, and a single glance told Frank that all were present.

In an emergency of this sort, Frank was under the authority of no one at the academy; he was permitted to act according to his best judgment.

"There is a fire in the village, men," he said, swiftly

but quietly. "We may be able to render assistance there. Are you ready?"

"All ready!"

"Then go ahead!"

Away they went on the run, clinging together in one compact mass, Frank leading.

There was a stiff wind blowing, and as they ran they saw a red glow showing against the sky.

Every lad in the fire brigade was a sprinter, and they made quick time over the mile of good road that lay between the academy and Fardale village.

As they drew near the village, a feeling of alarm and anxiety grew in Frank's breast, for he saw that the glow of the fire came from that quarter of the place where Inza Burrage's home was situated.

"What if it is Inza's home?"

The thought filled him with horror, and fairly staggered him for a moment.

Then he suddenly shot forward with the speed of a deer, and the other boys found they could not hold their own with him. He swiftly drew away from them, fairly flying along the streets.

The sleepy villagers were just turning out. Around a corner came several of the fire company, dragging a hand-tub.

They shouted for him to catch hold, but he flew past them like the wind.

In various parts of the village he could hear individuals shouting fire, but it seemed to him they were benumbed.

He passed one or two who were running in the same direction, and they must have wondered at his speed.

More and more the conviction that it was Inza's home came upon him, and, at last, he turned a corner and saw that it was true.

The L was a mass of flames, and the main house had already caught.

Quite a collection of persons were gathered about, but they seemed to be standing numbly by, waiting for the antiquated fire apparatus of the village to arrive.

A few were engaged in fetching furniture from the parlor, but not a drop of water had been cast upon the fire.

Frank burst into the midst of the staring collection of individuals, hoarsely crying:

"Is every one out of the house?"

"I guess so," drawled one man, who had found time to take in a huge quid of tobacco since getting out of bed.

"Guess so!" shouted Frank." Don't you know? What are you on earth for?"

"Look here, young fellow," began the man, "don't you sass——"

But Frank did not pause to hear what he had to say. He saw some of the crowd gathered around some one who had been brought out of the house, and he forced his way to the center, where he found Inza, who had been overcome by smoke.

"Inza!" he cried, as he knelt beside her. "Thank Heaven! you are safe!"

His voice seemed to arouse her. She started up, clutching his arm, and crying:

"Forgive me, Frank—forgive me! Elsie—she is in there! Save her—save her!"

His strong arms flung men to the right and left, and he dashed into the house in the twinkling of an eye, disappearing up the smoke-shrouded stairway.

The act had been seen by a person who stood on the outskirts of the crowd, and that person muttered:

"He's gone in there to rescue some one. He has escaped from the sea, but fire might do the work!"

In another moment this man rushed toward the house. Some one stepped in front of him, but, with a fierce exclamation, he dashed the person to the ground.

As he reached the doorway he turned to look back.

The glare of the fire showed a livid scar upon his left cheek.

After that pause to inhale a deep breath of fresh air, he bounded up the stairs after Frank Merriwell.

CHAPTER XLVII.

FROM THE FLAMES.

Frank was baffled by the darkness. He reached the head of the stairs, and, for all of the smoke, called again and again to Elsie.

He received no answer.

The smoke threatened to drive him back. His eyes and throat were filled; he coughed and strangled.

But he would not give up.

"Go ahead!"

Hissing these words through his teeth, he groped his way along till he came to a door, which failed to open to his touch.

Frank realized that he must have air very soon.

"Go ahead!"

With all his strength, he hurled himself against the door, and it yielded before him.

As he plunged into the room, he stumbled over something and fell prostrate.

The smoke was not so dense near the floor, and he succeeded in getting something like a breath.

In getting up, his hand touched the object over which he had fallen, and he uttered a cry of amazement, for it was the body of a human being.

Kneeling, his hands sought this person. He touched the face, the hair, and then he quickly cried:

"It is Elsie!"

A faint moan came from the lips of the girl, who had been overcome by the smoke.

The alarm of fire had roused her from the bed in which she was sleeping with Inza. She had attempted to dress herself, while Inza had fled from the room; but the smoke had become so dense that she tried to follow her new-found friend. Then it was that she groped her way to the wrong door, which was fastened, and beat upon it with her hands till she fell exhausted and unconscious.

Knowing it must be Elsie, Frank gathered her up in his arms. His strength and energy were almost gone, but he would not succumb. Blindly he staggered forward, with the precious burden in his arms. He sought the door, but chance took him in the opposite direction, and he made his way into yet another room.

The light of the fire now shone in by a window, and this window he sought. Lifting his foot, he dashed out sash, glass, and all, and a refreshing gust of cool night air poured in upon him.

As he leaned out of the window, still holding Elsie in his arms, a shout rose from below.

He was seen. The crowd cheered when they beheld the girl.

Frank breathed in great draughts of air, and his strength returned.

Several men gathered beneath the window, and one of them shouted:

"Drop her; we'll catch her."

Frank hesitated a moment, and then, pressing the unconscious girl in his arms a moment, he held her out of the window.

"Ready!" he called.

"All ready," came back.

"Now—catch her!"

He let her drop, and they caught her, so she was not harmed by the fall.

"I rather think I had better leap from this window instead of trying to find the stairs," said Frank, aloud.

"Don't be in a hurry!" snarled a savage voice, and then Frank was clutched and dragged back into the burning house.

Frank twisted about, and by the glare of the fire, which now shone in by the window so that the room was lighted with a reddish-yellow glare, he saw the scarred face of Carlos Merriwell!

"You!" he panted.

"Yes," was the answer that was hissed in his ear. "You are not delighted to see me?"

"How do you happen here?"

"I saw you enter the house, and I followed. You escaped last night, but you'll not escape again, cousin mine!"

"Cousin!" gasped Frank. "I am no cousin to you!"

"Oh, yes, you are! I am the son of your father's brother, that old fool who intends to make you his heir when he dies!"

"Uncle Asher?"

"Exactly."

"It is false! Uncle Asher never married!"

"That's where you fool yourself. He married my mother, but they did not get along as well as they might, and she left him when I was a year old. He kept the marriage a secret, but he was forced to support us handsomely as the price of silence. Mother died some years ago, and I have since been wandering over the face of the earth. I got into one or two unpleasant scrapes, so my virtuous old fool of a father disowned me. Now he thinks me dead, as he has not heard of me in some years; but my silence was enforced, as I was taking a vacation behind bars. When I got out, a friend posted me on the lay of the land at home, and I shipped for this country.

I have no hope that I may reinstate myself in the old man's favor, but I mean to put you out of the way. Then, when the old fool kicks the bucket, I may be able to fight my way into a portion of his fortune, at least."

Frank was stunned, dazed, bewildered. Could it be true? Was it possible that this scar-faced young villain, this jailbird, of whom he had never known till the night before, was his own blood cousin?

The sailor had him in a firm clutch, and it would not be easy to break away. Carlos Merriwell, like the miserable wretch he was, seemed to take delight in gloating over his intended victim.

During this time the fire was making rapid progress. A draught through the house, which came in by the window, seemed to sweep the smoke away, but the flames were beginning to eat through the partition and the ceiling, from which the plastering was dropping in great flakes.

"It's coming!" cried the sailor, "and it will wipe out every trace of my work! They will believe you were overcome by the smoke, and so perished in the flames. Your death will not be placed against me."

"And I'll not die without a struggle!" panted Frank, as he twisted about and succeeded in catching at one of the ruffian's wrists.

But the fellow had a hold which Frank could not break, and his hand went up to the lad's throat, the fingers fastening there with a crushing grip, closing the windpipe. With all his strength, Frank fought, but his efforts were vain. In his ears sounded a terrible roaring, a fiery haze floated before his eyes, followed by blind blackness, and the half-formed thought that death had come.

* * * * * * * *

Frank recovered to find himself in the open air, to see

friends and comrades bending over him, revealed by the light of the flames, which now entirely enwrapped the house. He started up, uttering a muffled, choking cry:

"The fire—Carlos—where——"

"Be aisy, Frankie," soothingly said Barney Mulloy. "Av ye can't be aisy, be aisy as ye can."

"You are all right," said Bart Hodge. "When you failed to come out, I thought something must be wrong, and so I went to look for you. Barney went with me."

"Thot's roight, an' nivver a bit too soon wur we, aither."

"Carlos Merriwell—where is he?"

"It's but a taste av the place he's gone to that he got in th' foire," declared Barney.

"We had all we could do to get out," explained Hodge. "I believe Barney hit the ruffian a crack that laid him out."

"And he perished in the fire?" asked Frank, shuddering with horror.

"He has not been seen to leave the house."

"It was retributive justice," came huskily from the lips of the rescued lad.

* * * * * * * *

Fortunately, the house and its furniture were fully insured, and, for all of the fire company's primitive apparatus for fighting fire, the flames did not spread to other property.

Noel Burrage was not a poor man, so he could have endured the loss without great deprivation if he had not been astute enough to be well protected.

Frank Merriwell was praised for saving Elsie; but Hodge and Mulloy won honors and applause by rescuing Frank from the clutches of the wretch who was determined to destroy him.

For all that no traces of Carlos Merriwell's bones were

found amid the ruins, it was believed that he had perished in the flames, and all seemed to feel that the world was well rid of him.

But the rascal was not dead, and what he did to injure Frank will be told in the next volume of this series, entitled "Frank Merriwell's Trip West."

The time quickly came for Elsie Bellwood to leave Fardale with her parents. She could not go away without bidding Frank farewell, and he called upon her at her request.

"It is not likely we shall ever meet again, Mr. Merriwell," she said, as he held her hand on the point of leaving her.

Her chin quivered, and her blue eyes filled with tears.

"Don't say that!" pleaded Frank. "We may. Who knows what the future has in store?"

"I shall never forget you," she went on, warmly; "never."

And so they parted.

Frank went out, and turned his face toward Fardale Academy. For a considerable distance he walked with his eyes on the ground.

"Frank!"

It was Inza's voice; she was calling to him. He paused, and she joined him. Together they strolled slowly down the road, talking and laughing. The sunlight was bright on their faces, and they looked happy.

"BEST OF ALL BOYS' BOOKS"

THE FAMOUS

Frank Merriwell Stories

By BURT L. STANDISH

No modern series of tales for boys and youths has met with anything like the cordial reception and popularity accorded to the Frank Merriwell Stories.

There must be a reason for this and there is. Frank Merriwell, as portrayed by the author, is a jolly, wholesouled, honest, courageous American lad, who appeals to the hearts of the boys. He has no bad habits, and his manliness inculcates the idea that it is not necessary for a boy to indulge in petty vices to be a hero. Frank Merriwell's example is a shining light for every ambitious lad to follow.

Twenty-four volumes ready

Frank Merriwell's School Days	Frank Merriwell's Skill
Frank Merriwell's Chums	Frank Merriwell's Champions
Frank Merriwell's Foes	Frank Merriwell's Return to Yale
Frank Merriwell's Trip West	Frank Merriwell's Secret
Frank Merriwell Down South	Frank Merriwell's Loyalty
Frank Merriwell's Bravery	Frank Merriwell's Reward
Frank Merriwell's Races	Frank Merriwell's Faith
Frank Merriwell's Hunting Tour	Frank Merriwell's Victories
Frank Merriwell's Sports Afield	Frank Merriwell's Power
Frank Merriwell at Yale	Frank Merriwell's Set-Back
Frank Merriwell's Courage	Frank Merriwell's False Friend
Frank Merriwell's Daring	Frank Merriwell's Brother

Illustrated, cloth binding, 50 cents per volume

For sale by all booksellers, or sent, postpaid, on receipt of price by the publisher

DAVID McKAY, Philadelphia

UC 847E

University of California Library
Los Angeles
This book is DUE on the last date stamped below.

Phone Renewals
310/825-9188

RECD LD-URL
QL OCT 14 1996
APR 12 1998
QL JAN 16 2001
DEC 18 00

University of California, Los Angeles
L 006 130 701 3